



## Mental Skills Training for Sport

Moira E. Stuart, Ph.D.

Included in this preview:

- Copyright Page
- Table of Contents
- Excerpt of Chapter 1

For additional information on adopting this book for your class, please contact us at 800.200.3908 x71 or via e-mail at [info@cognella.com](mailto:info@cognella.com)

# Mental Skills Training for Sport

Moira E. Stuart, Ph.D

Northern Illinois University



If you wish to contact the author for a speaking engagement, please send your emails to [mestuart@niu.edu](mailto:mestuart@niu.edu).

Copyright © 2010 by Moira E. Stuart. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted, reproduced, transmitted, or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying, microfilming, and recording, or in any information retrieval system without the written permission of University Readers, Inc.

First published in the United States of America in 2010 by Cognella, a division of University Readers, Inc.

Trademark Notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

14 13 12 11 10

1 2 3 4 5

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 978-1-935551-02-7



[www.cognella.com](http://www.cognella.com) 800.200.3908

# Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>vii</i>

## **CHAPTER 1: BUILDING YOUR FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESS** **1**

---

<b>Mental Training</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>My Mental Toughness</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Mental Toughness</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Expectations</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Expectations Throughout Your Sport Career</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Expectations of Others</b>	<b>11</b>

## **CHAPTER 2: GOAL SETTING TOOLS** **13**

---

<b>My Practice Goals</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Practice Goals Evaluation</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>My Competition Goal</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Competition Goal Evaluation</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Non-Sport Goals</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Weekly Goal Evaluation</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Postseason Goals</b>	<b>22</b>

## **CHAPTER 3: CONFIDENCE BUILDING TOOLS** **23**

---

<b>Confident Thinking</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Confident Thinking Exercise</b>	<b>24</b>

<b>Tools for Building Confidence</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>More Tools for Building Confidence</b>	<b>27</b>

---

<b>CHAPTER 4: VIZUALIZATION TOOLS</b>	<b>31</b>
---------------------------------------	-----------

<b>Visualize Success</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Mental Practice</b>	<b>34</b>

---

<b>CHAPTER 5: FOCUSING TOOLS</b>	<b>37</b>
----------------------------------	-----------

<b>Focus Skills</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Shifting Your Focus</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Practice Focus</b>	<b>41</b>

---

<b>CHAPTER 6: MENTAL TRAINING GAME PLAN</b>	<b>43</b>
---	-----------

<b>Practice Evaluation</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Competition Day Mental Routine</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Competition Evaluation</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Commitment to Reaching My Potential</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Commitment to My Team</b>	<b>48</b>

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book would not have been possible if not for the privileged opportunity to work with the hundreds of dedicated student athletes at Northern Illinois University. So many student athletes dedicated their precious personal time reviewing and discussing what they wanted and needed in a mental skills training book. From the perspective of the student athlete, this book truly reflects the mental skills training needed to be a competitive athlete in today's sport environment. Numerous high school athletes also provided honest feedback to make this book useful and pertinent for all levels of sport.

Opportunities are both earned and provided. The opportunity to write this book, and in turn help student athletes reach their potential, was made possible through the initial and on-going support of the NIU athletics administrative staff. Ongoing gratitude goes to my alma mater, Oregon State University, where I gained my initial opportunity to teach mental skills training to collegiate athletes.

Last, but not least, deepest thanks to my family and support system for encouraging me to pursue my goals and dreams by their unconditional love and support. To my late mother, Rita V. Stuart, thank you for raising me to believe I could do anything I dreamed in life.

## PREFACE

This book was developed to help you, the student athlete, reach your performance potential through the process of learning and practicing mental skills training techniques. In this book, you will learn hands-on mental training tools needed to develop mental toughness in both sport and life. By developing the mental tools for success, you will be able to respond well under pressure situations, sustain enjoyment in your sport, and experience the best that competition has to offer. By using this manual year round, you will be committing to reaching your personal potential as well as contributing to your team's journey toward its potential.

# 1 Building Your Foundation for Success

---

## **MENTAL TRAINING**

### **What is mental training?**

**M**ental training involves the process of developing the mental skills needed to strengthen and condition your mind as you pursue your performance potential. Think of your mind and body as a quality performance engine. In order to gain high performance, you need to fuel it properly and have the correct tools to maintain the engine. An athlete who has prepared both physically and mentally has developed the mental mindset of expecting success. While mental training is not a new concept, many athletes have not taken full advantage of their own inner strength. Tiger Woods, Peyton Manning, Annika Sorenstam, Serena Williams, and Michael Jordan are just a few examples of top athletes who have spoken about the important role mental training has played in contributing to their success in sport.

### **Here are some common reasons why student athletes use mental training:**

- ◆ To handle the transition from being a high school athlete to a college student athlete



- ◆ To handle competitive pressure
- ◆ To feel less anxious before competition
- ◆ To improve confidence in all situations
- ◆ To learn to move past mistakes during competition
- ◆ To understand and accept the present sport role
- ◆ To learn from coaches' feedback
- ◆ To move on after mistakes in competition
- ◆ To perform consistently
- ◆ To learn how to set and attain challenging goals
- ◆ To stay motivated and focused year-long

### **Rewards of mental training**

- ◆ When you *commit* to developing mental toughness, you will become aware of the power of your own mind. The first time you reach your intended goal through purposeful intent, you will gain momentum for performing consistently. As you begin to gain ability to create your own sport experience and believe in the power of your personal strength, you will begin to feel in control of creating your sport experience.
- ◆ Mental training also helps you to build mental toughness needed in competitive situations across both success and failure.
- ◆ You have chosen to be part of an elite group which recognizes that “where the mind goes the body will follow!” You have chosen to take control of both your mind and your body. Your willingness to look beyond just the physical training is what will take you from where you are to where you want to go.

### **What does mental training require?**

A desire to improve and a commitment to reach your potential is the first and most important requirement. Once you learn and

develop the tools they will require very little time commitment. Mental training can be done on a daily, weekly, or game-by-game basis. The worksheets that follow will require you to prepare your mind in the following settings:

- ◆ Practice
- ◆ Competition
- ◆ Preseason conditioning
- ◆ Off-season training
- ◆ Postseason conference play
- ◆ Tournament play

For each mental skill, you will develop a selection of mental *tools* that you can use in any given situation. It is important to understand that during the moment of competitive pressure, it is too late to develop your mental skills. Once you sharpen one tool it will help build another mental tool. Therefore, it is important to learn how to develop and select the right *tools* for any situation. So let's get started! Below is a list of common mental skills training tools needed to reach your performance potential:

- ◆ Goal-setting tools
- ◆ Focusing tools
- ◆ Confidence-building tools
- ◆ Effective thinking tools
- ◆ Mental imagery tools
- ◆ Relaxation tools
- ◆ Leadership tools
- ◆ Mental routine tools

## MY MENTAL TOUGHNESS

For each characteristic listed below, assign the number that corresponds with your abilities in each situation:

3=Possess this ability on a regular basis;

2=Possess this ability sometimes; or

1=Rarely possess this ability.

*Currently, I have:*

- \_\_\_\_\_ Strong beliefs about my ability to reach my goals
- \_\_\_\_\_ Strong beliefs that I have the ability to beat tough opponents
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have on-going motivation to succeed
- \_\_\_\_\_ I can bounce back from performance set backs
- \_\_\_\_\_ I thrive under pressure situations
- \_\_\_\_\_ I cope with the normal pre-competition anxiety
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am unaffected by others good or bad performances
- \_\_\_\_\_ I can remain reasonably focused through life distractions
- \_\_\_\_\_ I can push off physical pain while maintaining a high level of effort and performance
- \_\_\_\_\_ I can block out distractions during competition
- \_\_\_\_\_ I can motivate my teammates to succeed
- \_\_\_\_\_ I can shake off harsh criticism from my coaches
- \_\_\_\_\_ I can regain emotional control following a setback in a game

13–19 now is the time to build your mental toughness

20–26 you are on your way to being mentally tough at all times

27–39 strong mental toughness ... stay strong!

## MENTAL TOUGHNESS

Surely you have heard coaches talk about wanting their athletes to be mentally tough ... but what does mental toughness mean? Mental

toughness is a result of engaging in mental training that conditions an athlete to perform and react consistently and reach his or her performance potential on a consistent basis. Simply put, it is the complement and necessary mental conditioning needed to succeed.

### **Signs of a mentally tough athlete:**

- ◆ Strong beliefs about the ability to reach goals
- ◆ Strong beliefs in personally having the ability to beat tough opponents
- ◆ Ongoing motivation to succeed
- ◆ Can bounce back from performance setbacks
- ◆ Thrives under pressure
- ◆ Copes with the normal pre-competition anxiety
- ◆ Is unaffected by others' good or bad performances
- ◆ Remains reasonably focused through life's distractions
- ◆ Can push off physical pain while maintaining a high level of effort and performance
- ◆ Can block out distractions during competition
- ◆ A strong determination to succeed, which motivates teammates
- ◆ Can shake off harsh criticism from the coaches
- ◆ Can regain emotional control following a setback in a game

One of the main benefits of mental training is to improve your mental toughness and attain the response and performance you want in any situation. The good news is mental toughness can be developed so let's get started by understanding how you view expectations for success in sport.

## **EXPECTATIONS**

Expectations for success are your beliefs about what you think is possible in any given situation. Champions expect success every time they

compete and stay focused until their expectations are met. They also know the difference between realistic and unrealistic expectations. Therefore, it is important to understand both the expectations that you have of yourself as well as the expectations of others.

### **What I expect from myself**

In achievement situations we develop beliefs about what we think, *will*, and *should* happen. As an athlete you expect a certain level of performance from yourself every time you compete. Sometimes these expectations are realistic and based on your past successes. Other times they are not realistic and are based on what we think others expect from us. Our personal expectations should be based on what we know we can accomplish and what we are motivated to achieve.

### **What others expect of me**

Athletes often describe pressure as a concern about whether or not we can meet the expectations of others. These feelings of pressure often come from what others tell us we can or should accomplish. Many of you were stand-out athletes in your high schools and hometowns. However, in college you are among the best of the best. In turn, you need to reestablish your expectations for success. In your first year, your job is to learn and accept the expectations that your coaches set for you as a new member of the team. Be patient, but be persistent. Remember that success comes to the prepared mind.

## **EXPECTATIONS THROUGHOUT YOUR SPORT CAREER**

### **First-year expectations**

As a first-year student athlete, your expectations are formed from previous high school or junior college experiences. Having a successful

first-year transition will depend in part on your willingness to learn and accept a new role. In your first year you may get anxious about the expectations of others, including what parents or friends think you should achieve. In turn, you may get overwhelmed by wondering if you can handle what is going to be asked of you. Remember, however, that you earned this opportunity to compete. Your first-year challenge is to set realistic expectations of yourself especially as you are learning your new role, team, and environment.

*In my first year, my expectations of myself as a student athlete were/are:*

---

*Who influenced these expectations (myself, parents, coaches, family/friends)?*

---

*Which expectations were you able to meet?*

---

*What aspects of your first year were more than you expected?*

---

*What was/is your biggest challenge in your first year?*

---

---

*Whom did you use as a support system in this first year?*

---

### **Second-year expectations**

A main goal this year is to learn and develop into your sport role. This includes getting used to your teammates. Additionally, this year includes learning what role coaches expect of you and fulfilling that role.

*In my second year my expectations were/are:*

---

*Who influenced these expectations (myself, parents, coaches, family/friends)?*

---

*Which expectations were you able to meet?*

---

*What aspects of your second year were more than you expected?*

---

*What was/is your biggest challenge in your second year?*

---

---

*Whom did you use as a support system in this second year?*

---

**Third-year expectations**

In the third year, a student athlete is often asked to be a leader. Some athletes lead through their play, while others may take on a non-sport leadership role by helping underclassmen learn their roles.

*In my third year my expectations were/are:*

---

*Who influenced these expectations (myself, parents, coaches, family/friends)?*

---

*Which expectations were you able to meet?*

---

*Which aspects of your third year were more than you expected?*

---

*What was/is your biggest challenge in your third year?*

---

---



*Whom did you use as a support system in this third year?*

---

### **Last-year expectations**

In the final year it is common to begin thinking about the transition out of sport. It is common to want to make our senior year the best year; however sometimes this can lead to unrealistic expectations. Some athletes put pressure on themselves to accomplish everything that they had yet to accomplish in the previous years of participation (e.g., delivering on a conference championship). Remember the only thing you can control is your own effort, attitude, and actions. During your senior year, the focus should be on doing your best and giving your all in every situation. Peace of mind will come from knowing that you gave your all and allow you to leave without regrets as you begin your next level of challenge in life after intercollegiate sport.

*In my final year my expectations are:*

---

*Do you have any unmet expectations yet to fulfill?*

---

*What do you want to accomplish in this final year?*

---

---

*What was/is your biggest challenge in your last year?*

---

*How will you remain realistic about your expectations for your final year?*

---

*Whom do you plan to use as a support system in this final year?*

---

What advice would you give to incoming athletes in terms of maintaining realistic expectations and having a successful transition to college?

## **EXPECTATIONS OF OTHERS**

### **Expectations from coaches**

You may or may not know what your coach expects of you. However, if you are the type of person who feels better knowing what is expected of you, you will need to develop the courage and the communication skills to discuss with your coach what he/she expects of you as a member of the team.

Communicating with your coach about your role may be somewhat uncomfortable, however the benefits of clarifying your role include less worry and greater satisfaction with your sport experience.

### **Questions that other athletes have asked their coaches:**

- ◆ I was wondering where you see me contributing to the team this year.

- ◆ I was wondering what I need to do to compete for a starting role.
- ◆ How can I get more playing time?
- ◆ What do I need to improve on?
- ◆ What do I need to do less of in competition?

*Below, write down a few questions that you would like to ask of your coaches about his/her expectations:*

---

---

---

---

In summary, expectations that you develop for yourself should be based on what *you* can control. Setting goals that are within your control is a great place to start.