

**“The Mental Game”:  
Mental Skills Training Curriculum**

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## **“The Mental Game”**

Mental aspects of sport performance is growing in popularity with growing awareness. Many athletes have coined phrases highlighting how important their mental game is to their overall performance:

“Ninety percent of the game is half mental,” Yogi Berra.

“You have to train your mind like you train your body,” Bruce Jenner.

“A full mind is an empty bat,” Branch Rickey.

“When I’m in my groove there is no thinking. Everything just happens,” Ozzie Smith.

“You must be present to win,” Alex Rodriguez

(Mack & Casstevens, 2001).

Developing mental skills is foundational to optimal performance. Helping athletes develop conscious, contextual, and consistent mental training methods requires commitment, understanding, and self-discipline. As consultants, helping athletes to tap into their best, we need to incorporate the what, why, when, and how of mental skills coupled with developed technical skills in their sport. When this is done in an empowering, flexible way that is meaningful and fun for the athlete, they can reach their goals and dreams (Williams & Krane, 2021).

This curriculum strives to provide an overview of foundational elements, techniques, and tools to help inform and guide athletic mental skills development.

# **Developing a Healthy Athletic Identity**

## ***Chapter 1***

### **Introduction**

Developing a healthy athletic identity is part one of a series of ten chapters providing an overview of Mental Skills Training (MST) curriculum. Each chapter will provide an outline of the definition, concept, overview, and application of an identified mental skill to create a fulsome reference for consultants to guide their practice.

### **Mental Skills Training**

The term mental and psychological skills are often used interchangeably. For this curriculum, I will use the term mental skills which are defined as a set of skills that focus on the systematic enhancement of performance through consistent practice. These skills draw from the foundation of many areas; however, the primary stream is from the field of psychology from varying methods (e.g., behavior modification, cognitive therapy, goal setting, attentional control, muscle relaxation, and systematic desensitization (Weinberg & Gould, 2019). As with physical training, sport skill/technique development, mental skills require intentional, contextually relevant planning, execution, practice, and evaluating on a consistent basis with the athlete. Mental skills have a primary role in enhancing concentration, focus, arousal control, confidence, motivation, and overall performance. Research is mixed; however, it is often estimated that 50-90% of performance success is based on mental performance (Weinberg & Gould, 2019). How well we can tap into the mental skills also has an influence on motivation and overall performance.

## **Athletic Identity**

Defining personal identity is unique to every individual, however in general terms, may be defined as the distinguishing qualities of an individual that encompasses their beliefs, personality traits, personal expressions/characteristics, within the context of what the person identifies as most important to them. Athletic identity can be defined as the degree an athlete identifies with their sport and how they perceive themselves, how others perceive them, and the level of significance this has on their own self-worth (Player Development Project, [www.playerdevelopmentproject.com](http://www.playerdevelopmentproject.com)).

Developing a healthy athletic identity is important to they have a healthy concept of self and all the aspects of what they think they are (Weinberg & Gould, 2019). Often, in sport or in life in general, a person or athlete it is important to remember that what we do does not define who we are. When an athlete has a healthy identity, one can recognize their gifts/talents (sport) is what they do but does not define who they are. Athletic identity is often established in the developmental stages of sport (e.g., ages 10-12), therefore, fostering a sense of healthy identity and optimism is key to sustaining their interest and participation in sport (Gonzalez, 2023). Unfortunately, many athletes drop out of sport at age 13 making the focus on healthy identity development that much more important in the developmental years of young athletes.

On the contrary, Dr. John Amaechi (2018) noted in his AACP speech, “if you are what you do, you stop being you”. This perspective highlights features of an unhealthy athletic identity risking changing the person from who they once were as they are not able to define themselves outside of what they did once they can no longer perform in their identified role. This subtle shift in perspective is important, as life or circumstances can change in an instant (e.g., debilitating injury, loss of job) resulting is a significant life change and as a result challenge

one's self-concept/athletic identity (Giannone, 2017). If the athlete ties their self-concept solely on what they do, they can lose who they are and research notes elevated depression and difficult transition for athletes/people with this altered perspective of self (Weinberg & Gould, 2017). As consultants, helping athletes see their self concept and life beyond sport and not what they do or did (Giannone, 2017).

## **Motivation**

Motivation fundamentally is defined as the direction and amount of effort one puts into their pursuit/sport. Understanding the athlete's ideal situation, traits, motives, adaptability to their environment, the ability to be coached/influenced, and modify their behavior is important in implementing mental skills (Weinberg & Gould, 2019). When working with athletes, understanding their motives and/or the level of motivation they are at (e.g., low or high motivation) and matching approaches to support achievement motivation (e.g., looking to master a task, achieve excellence, overcome obstacles, and perform better than others) or if they are competitive (e.g., desire to perform better than others compared to the same standard as evaluated by others). These skills develop through various stages, but the goal is to support athletes to be autonomous, achieve mastery, integrated view to see themselves with a healthy social and self-conceptual frame. When working with athletes, as consultants we can assess their social context and motivating factors, enhance individual mastery goals, provide positive, constructive feedback, and supporting them in their positive self-concept/identity, competence, and control which can be significantly enhanced via mental skills training (Weinberg & Gould, 2019).

## **Interactive Activity**

To build rapport with your athlete and understand their current baseline, recommend the use of the Performance Profile created by Butler & Hardy (1992) noted in (Weinberg and Gould, 2019, p. 276) with your athlete. This quantitative tool helps to form a baseline for athlete and consultant to establish a basis for goal setting, identify their strengths and weaknesses, raise their awareness, evaluate, and monitor performance, and helps to create a foundation for discussion, interaction, and evaluation. Completing this profile will help to refine your experience in assessing and reflection on performance profiling and support self-reflection on how you will apply this in the future. Looking at the results together with your athlete and utilizing these findings will help you to co-design a comprehensive plan to build on their strengths, develop skills to enhance areas of growth, and skills to deal with adversity. It is exciting to be able to pull all these components together to support elite athletes as well as others reach their optimal potential and performance.

## **Conclusion**

We will delve into building on the content from part one and expanding to include the development of mental skills including performance routines, self-talk, goal setting and goal implementation, going deeper into mental toughness, focus, concentration, managing distraction, imagery, arousal management, breathing, handling performance errors, setbacks, and use of technology/tools to enhance sport performance in subsequent chapters.

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# **Creating Performance Routines**

## ***Chapter 2***

### **Introduction**

Creating performance routines is the second chapter of our Mental Skills Training curriculum. In this chapter, I will provide an overview of the importance of performance preparation, including pre, during, and post competition routines, and supporting resources to guide your practice.

### **Defining Performance Routines**

The definition of pre-performance routines (PPRs) is described by Moran (1996) as a sequence of task relevant thoughts and actions that an athlete practices systematically prior to competition in their sport (Hazell et, al., 2014). Hazell (2014) also outline a broad body of research that shows PPRs enhance performance, however it is not clear as to exactly why. There is promising results showing they improve self-efficacy, confidence, and reduction in anxiety.

“Flow” is defined as a state of consciousness where one becomes absorbed in what the athlete is doing including thoughts and emotions (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999).

### **Rationale for Performance Routines**

Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi (1999) notes creating pre-competition plans well in advance of competition is helpful to enhance performance, promote “flow state”, and reduce thinking in the moment resulting in a high chance of autolytic performance. The more the athlete practices mental and physical skills in advance, the more automatic their performance becomes. This in and of itself helps promote confidence and self-efficacy. Having rehearsed the mental and



physical aspects of their sport, well in advance, makes game time execution of the skills automatic and helps them to focus on their task at hand and stay present in the moment and less “in their head.”

## **Creating Routines and Performance Readiness**

Ensuring you meet the client where they are at, understanding what they see is important, what context do they look at their situation from, what makes their sport fun, what adversity do they struggle with, understanding what their “best state or flow state” looks like and for them to describe when and how that felt and was last experienced (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999).

Setting goals is key to establishing routine/performance plan. Understanding the overall objective, measures of success with a time frame of which to complete the identified goal for preparation, performance, and dealing with adversity is necessary to guide planning, commitment, decision making and success.

A goal is defined as an objective or aim to achieve a specific proficiency of a task within a defined task. There are three main types of goals – outcome goals (standards of results of a competition), performance goals (focus on improvements on one’s own performance), and process goals (procedures the athletes undertake during their performance). Incorporating goal setting early in routine development consistently enhances performance (Williams & Krane, 2021).

This is a great time to complete the Routine and Readiness plan see link: [Part 2 of MST Curriculum Creating Performance Routines Worksheet.html](#).

Having the athlete complete this worksheet helps to understand their preparation goals, challenges, and desired state for: preparation, resiliency and positive coping skills when dealing with adversity; their perspective on the level of physical intensity needed for them to achieve the optimal performance, and the level of focus/concentration needed for them to perform their best.

Once this worksheet is completed, the consultant would work with the athlete to implement these strategies, evaluate them each week, and adjust as needed. Working with the athlete to develop effective, meaningful, contextually relevant routines is helpful. To demonstrate this sharing an example of my son and his preparation routine prior to bull-riding:

*Preparation* – my athlete identified they need to get amped up with positive energy before arriving to the arena, stay focused in the moment, reduce anxiety in the moment of competing, and practice deep breathing/visualization before they compete. To aid in preparation, he watches his favorite championship ride before he drives to the arena, on the way there, he listens to his favorite songs and visualizes himself making the championship ride. If he can, he watches videos of the bulls that will be in the next rodeo draw to watch their style/moves as well of those of the cowboys who have rode them.

*Resilience/intensity/focus* – he will stay calm and focus on one second at a time, executing each move and anticipating the move of the bull which he has no control over, and stay focused on keeping his head down, with his body/hand/groin in the middle of the bull at all times, counterbalancing with his other hand/movements. During this entire time, he stays focused without a break in concentration, if he does, he refocuses on the bull's back – if he falls off, he runs as fast as he can out of the path of the bull.

*Post-competition* - After each ride, he watches videos to learn where he did well, and where he can improve. The goal is always to learn, have fun, and do it all for the love of the ride/rush and it's a bonus to win some money and not get hurt. He says, "it's all about getting better one second at a time."

## **Conclusion**

Establishing a clearly outlined plan for achieving performance routines is a great way to establish a clear structure to build a basis for goal setting, outlining strengths, areas for growth, athletic awareness, evaluating and monitoring athletic performance, and opens communication and interaction with the consultant, athlete, coach, and teams.

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## **Self Talk**

### ***Chapter 3***

#### **Introduction**

Chapter three of the Mental Skills Training (MST) curriculum focuses on key aspects of incorporating self talk into this series of mental skills training curriculum.

The goal of mental skills is to identify and understand the athlete's strengths, confidence, challenges (e.g., doubts, anxieties, and fear), identify their goals and help them to create contextualized plans/routines to normalize their feelings, and support them in getting themselves back to focus and perform underscoring the thinker is in charge; not the thoughts (Gonzalez, 2024).

How we think influences how we feel which influences how we act. Negative thinking often results in a negative self-fulfilling prophesy; positive thinking and confidence can result in positive performance and self-fulfilling prophesy, as Henry Ford noted, "If you think you can do a thing or NOT do a thing, you are right."

#### **Self Talk**

Self-talk is defined as the internal dialogue that occurs in the athlete's head to simulate, reinforce, direct, and evaluate their actions that can be quite motivating when the messages are positive and affirming. It can be detrimental if it becomes distracting, negative, and/or self-defeating (Williams & Krane, 2021). There are several types of self-talk (e.g., instructional, motivational, mood related, and self-affirmative) that enhance performance. Mikes (1987) identified six steps to creating self-talk are: (1) short and specific phrases; (2) use first person and present tense; (3) positive phrases; (4) say phrases with meaning; (5) speak kindly to yourself,

and (6) repeat phrases often. It is noted in a variety of research this practice helps to build confidence and enhanced performance (Weinberg & Gould, 2019).

Dolcos & Albarracin (2014) completed a study highlighting additional key considerations to guide self-talk practice – the video link highlights these key practices:

[https://youtu.be/84eZsuyA0\\_w?si=aDwcR31DTX1Kux7](https://youtu.be/84eZsuyA0_w?si=aDwcR31DTX1Kux7)

### **Working with Athletes to Implement Self-Talk**

Our bodies react to stress and adversity in different ways; however, our mind has significant power of what we can and can't do. What we tell ourselves impacts everything we do – every thought produces a feeling, your feelings create your actions, and your actions contribute to your results. If we can frame our thoughts and feelings into motivating, confidence building thoughts/actions, our results will be much better than self-defeating, negative thinking.

Often when things are difficult it can become overwhelming. There are so many ways to look at things. When working with a new client, I would work to understand how they assess their state (personality and stable level of confidence) and trait (how you are feeling in the moment) confidence (Weinberg & Gould, 2019) by asking the following questions:

- I am curious, when do you feel super confident?
- When things are hard or odds are stacked against you, what do you think or tell yourself?
- When do you feel doubt and what does that look like (e.g., what runs through your mind, how do you feel physically)?
- Do you look forward to competing?
- What helps you to get motivated or fired up?

- When do you feel most confident/fired up?
- When do you feel the least confident or deflated?
- What do you tell yourself during these times?

To further assess my client's sport confidence, I would conduct The Sport Confidence Inventory (TSCI) (Vealey, 1986) <https://ess220.files.wordpress.com>

I would then discuss/reflect on these responses and categorize them into three categories Event, Thought, Action (ETA) to help them further break them down and understand:

E – what are the things that are challenging you most in the game

T – develop a mental plan to address difficult things (P3 thinking- purposeful, productive, possible) (Gonzalez, 2024) to reframe the same feeling into a more positive frame/thought with them.

A – what are the scouts or your coach thinking about your play?

Once we review all of these elements, we would work to developing tools and routines (e.g., journalling these thoughts/patterns at pre-during-post competition and work towards creating a positive script/or phrase that is “real” for them in the context that makes sense to help them to stay focused, confident, and positive in the moment; this may also include listening to a motivational short video or a song). A sample self talk video was developed by Nike (2018) of which may be used with the athlete to help demonstrate how they can create a self talk script of their own [https://youtu.be/VjYIBFXda0?si=\\_JVvjdXga66D7aW7f](https://youtu.be/VjYIBFXda0?si=_JVvjdXga66D7aW7f)

Following testing/implementation of self talk at various points in their play, we would review the results/benefits of this after pre-competition, during, and post-competition to review/adjust/find the right routines that fit with the athlete to help them perform their best in

training, competition, reflection, and practice. Self-talk, when practiced consistently, can help athletic performance with as little as 15-30 minutes three to five times per week (Williams & Krane, 2021).



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## **Goal Setting**

### ***Chapter 4***

#### **Introduction**

Chapter four of our Mental Skills Training (MST) Curriculum focus' on defining, outlining some key aspects of, and outline a case study example of incorporating goal setting into MST. Micheal Jordan sums up goal setting well stating, "I am a firm believer in goal setting. Step by step, I can't see any other way of accomplishing anything."

#### **Case Study**

Jen is a 50-year-old woman who has been reasonably active throughout her life. She has been through a series of tumultuous changes over the past 3 years. She has always strived to be her best, she is an executive in her field, has achieved a successful career, but her confidence has been shaken with several personal losses. She is now looking to regain her confidence in various areas, one of which is to beat her personal best time of running a race this summer with her team of friends and family.

#### **Goal Setting**

##### *Overview*

Goals can be described as the road map an individual sets out to follow to achieve their desired outcome. Goals provide us with direction, help us to stay focused and motivated, and tap into growth opportunities (Weinberg & Gould, 2019).

As Mount Everest mountaineer, Sir Edmund Hilary so succinctly described goals, “You don’t have to be a fantastic hero do certain things – to compete. You can be just an ordinary chap, sufficiently motivated to reach challenging goals.”

Goals are such a common aspect to life and applicable to most situations where one wants to achieve something, be it a New Year’s resolution or to win an Olympic gold medal. They are such common place in discussion, but many falter to set goals that are effectively described and have a corresponding plan to execute them. There are several aims, definitions, and types of goals; there are also several principles and processes to guide goal setting to be effective in goal achievement and addressing barriers, which will be broken down into further detail (Weinberg & Gould, 2019).

### *Theories of Goal Setting and Goal Achievement*

Goal setting is anchored in a few different theories. The first one is goal-setting theory focuses on defining the types of goals utilized in sport and exercise psychology. These are known as objective and subjective goals and outcome, performance, and process goals.

An objective goal has been defined as the desire to achieve a standard of proficiency of an identified task within a specified time (measurable) (e.g., Jen would like to complete a 5-kilometer run in less than 30 minutes within 5 months; a subjective goal is a general intention to achieve a desired state or change (not measurable) (e.g., I’d like to be a better runner).

Outcome goals primarily focus on the result or outcome of a competitive event (e.g., winning a gold medal, winning the hockey game) which is contingent on individual performance as well as the effort and ability of the opponent(s) (Gould and Weinberg, 2017). Outcome goals are generally identified as helpful when setting longer term goals as noted, they are often many

variables that are not controlled by the individual nor are they flexible or adaptable. They do help to facilitate motivation to engage in short term plans/practice to achieve the longer-term outcome but are often not helpful in the short term or in-the-moment competition (Williams & Krane, 2021).

Performance goals are focused on improving individual performance measuring against their own previous performances or more specifically look at ways of improving a certain skill or task (e.g., improving their running time from race 1 from 6 minutes to 5.50 minutes in race 2).

Process goals focus on activities/actions an individual executes to perform their best. This approach generally looks at developing routines/plans to help the individual develop the physical and mental attributes to achieve their optimal performance (e.g., focus on perfecting running form/stride, quick muscle twitch exercises to improve start times, integrate relaxation to prepare in advance to reduce pre-competition anxiety) (Gould & Weinberg, 2017).

The second theory highlighted in goal setting is Mechanistic theory (Locke & Latham, 1990, 2002) identify four ways that goals impact performance: focusing attention and action; mobilizing effort; increase immediate effort to prolong effort and persistence and establishing new learning strategies to setting goals. This theory focuses on a slightly different perspective on goal setting focusing on effort versus performance outcomes specifically (Williams & Krane, 2021) (e.g., Jen will focus on training, nutrition, sleep, relaxation, and concentration as well as weightlifting, sprinting, endurance, and stride to improve her running abilities).

The third theory highlighted in goal setting is Cognitive theory (Burton, 1983) which highlights how goals impact performance in an athletic environment related to anxiety, motivation, and confidence with a primary focus on breaking down three categories. One is

performance orientation which is focused on learning and self-improvement with an individual's belief of high ability, two is success orientation defines success on social comparison and winning with high perceived ability and three is failure orientation where success is defined on social comparison, winning with low perceived ability. (Williams & Krane, 2021) (e.g., Since undergoing a number of losses, Jen has developed a failure orientation, we will work to enhance her performance orientation by focusing on new skill development and self-improvement with reward to build her confidence and motivation to enhance her perception on ability).

### *Benefits to Goal Setting*

When working with individuals, it is helpful to anchor into the most applicable theory that best fits the context of the individual/circumstances and work to define a goal achievement plan that is contextually relevant to them.

A simple, relatable process for goal setting was shared in our lecture this week (Gonzalez, 2024) whereby it breaks the process into seven steps:

1. Identify an area to improve (e.g., define Jen's personal best running time – 30 minutes)
2. Identify a recent experience in the area the individual wants to improve (e.g., breakdown her last best five-kilometer run – felt mentally drained with low confidence ran five kilometers in 34 minutes)
3. Identify priorities regarding the area (e.g., Jen outlines her top priorities – to have fun with her friends and family, feel confident in her abilities, and to run the five kilometer race in less than 30 minutes).
4. Set SMARTER short term goals (see below)

5. Identify barriers to achieving the goal (e.g., Jen identified a number of performance issues in her last run such as low confidence, low endurance, fear of failure, comparing herself to others, anxiety, fatigue, and all or nothing thinking).
6. Monitor progress (see below)
7. Modify/adjust as necessary (see below)

When applying these principles, the consultant would work with the individual to outline these elements as an outline for their performance plan as noted in the examples provided. They would then break it down into SMART(ER) goals. This common acronym underscores the key principles to guide effective and measurable goals underpinning individual focus and goal achievement (Weinberg & Gould, 2019). The breakdown of SMARTER goals is:

Specific – goals need to be specific about the outcome the individual wants to achieve (e.g., Jen wants to run her best time in a less than 10-kilometer race).

Measurable – goal need to be outlined in a quantifiable way to measure what success looks like for the individual (e.g., Jen wants to run a time of less than 25 minutes in less than six months time).

Realistic – the goal needs to be realistic and achievable (e.g., Jen has been training with 1-minute sprints and weightlifting for the past 3 months, is in good shape and has a previous running time of 30 minutes without training). This goal would seem to be realistic to her abilities with progressive training over the next five months. Goals also need to be flexible and adaptable to account for unexpected events/changes to their schedule. This includes the creation of “when/then” thinking (Gonzalez, 2024). The consultant will work with the individual to identify potential barriers to achieve their

goals (e.g., Jen identified if the weather is bad/icy and she can't run outside, she will continue to train on the treadmill). This helps to reduce barriers and facilitate adaptable performance, motivation, and confidence by giving the individual control over their environment and have a backup plan to address obstacles.

Time-bound – the goal needs to be defined in timed intervals. (e.g., Jen will outline goals that include outcome, performance, and process goals over the next five months to meet her outcome goal of running a five-kilometre race in less than 25 minutes).

Evaluate – the goal needs to be evaluated along the way with practice and simulated environments to monitor progress and adjust training as needed. (e.g., every week, we will evaluate Jen's stride on the treadmill, start speed, and endurance and adjust training as needed to enhance her performance).

Reward/Readjust – as elements of the goal are broken down and achieved, the individual can reward themselves. (e.g. Jen will run her best five kilometres every week to monitor her time and mental performance to evaluate her training routine and make any necessary adjustments needed. She really likes chocolate, so she can purchase a bag of dark chocolate and bring a square for her five kilometres runs, if she meets her goal for the week, she can have the square of chocolate, if not, she leaves it in her bag until next time).

Using SMARTER goals helps the individual to stay focused on what their desired outcome is and break it down into specific and measurable pieces focusing on the positive and adjusting as needed to progressively improve performance. The attached worksheet is available to support your athlete outline their goals; the video link provides

a quick overview to walk through this process

[https://youtube.com/shorts/wy8JXwPk0HY?ai=V57kMG\\_dgb9AXppC](https://youtube.com/shorts/wy8JXwPk0HY?ai=V57kMG_dgb9AXppC)



Goal\_Setting\_Work  
sheet.pdf

### *How Goal Setting Enhances Motivation, Self-Efficacy, and Confidence*

Goal setting helps the individual to define what they want to achieve, how they want to achieve it, and when. Goals help to encourage work toward their desired state and nurtures their motivation to get there. Process and performance goals breakdown the micro-steps for the individual to develop their technical skills as well as their mental skills as when they achieve their micro technical and mental skills (e.g., Jen will practice self-talk, visualization, self-reflection as noted in previous chapters and affirm her progress and adjust each week) they monitor, evaluate, and adjust each week to continue to grow and develop. They celebrate/affirm their successes along the way and continue. I like the following quote noted by Vernacchia (2003), “Ink ‘em, and think ‘em; view ‘em and do’em; believe ‘em, and achieve ‘em.” As the individual builds on micro-level successes in their written goals and progress, their sense of autonomy, motivation, and confidence grows and builds over time to increase their level of enjoyment and performance. This improves self-efficacy, defined as an individuals’ belief in their ability to execute behaviors to achieve specific performance (Bandura, 1997) which subsequently builds their confidence as they accumulate micro successes along their journey.

Goal setting helps to lay the foundation to help the individual progressively work towards a desired outcome and break down clearly defined steps to help them to reach their ultimate



performance. It is a simple way to retain focus and progressively move toward enhanced performance.

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# **Mental Toughness and Resilience**

## ***Chapter 5***

### **Introduction**

This is part five of the MST curriculum. In this chapter, I am going to outline the definitions, theories, principles, and barriers to mental toughness and resilience and provide an opportunity to apply them.

### **Definition of Mental Toughness**

In previous chapters, we outlined goals, strengths, and self-talk. Mental toughness is a concept that is frequently talked about in sport psychology to help to tap into perseverance to achieve their goals and dreams. Connaughton, Hanton, & Jones, 2002) developed a definition of mental toughness as the natural and/or developed psychological edge that enables you to cope better than your competitors with demands of performance and to remain determined, focused, confident, and in control (Williams & Krane, 2021).

Mental toughness has been further quantified by Clough, Earle, and Sewell (2002) within four primary constructs:

- Control – handling many things at once
- Commitment – being focused on pursuing goals despite adversity
- Challenge – seeing adversity or threats as opportunities to grow
- Confidence – maintaining an unwavering belief in self

I think these are all very admirable elements and ones that have been elevated into the mainstream with the public promotion of these skills by extreme athletes such as David Goggins.

Goggins (2018) identifies a key component to his mental toughness encouraging individuals to choose any obstacle in their way, or set a new goal, and visualize overcoming or achieving it – painting a picture of what success looks like and feels like everyday and apply it every time you prepare to compete and every time you come upon an obstacle or adversity. The concepts have an appeal and a place in our work, however as noted (Weinberg & Gould, 2017) there are extremes that can be promoted which may lead to significant injury, overtraining, and long-term negative physical impacts and potentially negative behaviors when applied in the extreme – finding balance in knowing healthy limits and parameters is key.

### **Cognitive and Affective Components of Mental Toughness**

The cognitive aspects of mental toughness into the ‘thinking’ component of mental strength. These include elements to focus on thoughts and behaviors that propel performance excellence. For example, positive self talk (create a positive script to keep motivated or encouraged; outline positive ideas and strategies to stay focus on your goal/outcome); visualization (as noted above); goal setting (setting goals that are specific, measurable, achievable/adaptable, realistic, and time bound); growth mindset (seeing obstacles as opportunities for growth); focus and attention (create strategies that are meaningful to the individual to keep them focused and in the moment/reset e.g., deep breathing, mindfulness); creating healthy routines/habits (e.g., exercise, skills based training, healthy nutrition, sleep, and game prep and recovery); perseverance (refusing to give up; grit); and self-efficacy (the belief of having what it takes to be successful/resilient) (Weinberg & Gould, 2017).

*Activity: Watch “Heather Dorniden’s Inspiring 600 meter race”*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=70UF82nysIU>

*Think about a time you persevered and demonstrated mental toughness to achieve your desired outcome. What skills did you use to help create this mental toughness/self-efficacy in that event? (Smith, 2021).*

Affective elements of mental toughness include emotional regulation (identifying emotions that negatively impact actions/thoughts and reset them through a meaningful activity (e.g., deep breathing, relaxation, imagery, music, routines to distract from negative thoughts).

Mental toughness/resilience can be well captured in Nelson Mandela's quote, "Do not judge me by my success, judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again."

### **Contrast of Mental Toughness, Motivational Theory and Resiliency Theory**

Motivation and resiliency differ from mental toughness in several ways. There are several motivational theories:

- Need achievement theory – looks at personal and situational factors as primary predictors of behavior (personality, situation, tendencies, emotional reactions, and achievement related behaviors that motivate the person to achieve success or avoid failure
- Attribution theory – how people view and explain their success and/or failure (stability – talent, ability, luck; effort (internal cause) or opponents' ability (external) which has been described a person's sport or exercise behavior.
- Achievement goal theory – looks at a person's interpretation of what it takes to achieve success (winning, mastering a task) performance or task involved.
- Competence motivation theory – individual's perception of control, self-worth, and competence influence their motivation.

These theories all provide a framework to assess how the person views and distinguishes their focus/motives for success – these are fundamentally the elements that coaches/consultants work with to facilitate context and performance goals.

Resilience is defined as the ability to withstand or recover quickly from difficult conditions (Webster dictionary). Resilience involves strengthening the protective factors that help buffer against adversity.” Protective factors include quality of life, mental health, physical, health, relationships, social inclusion, and resources. Gonzalez (2024) highlights several resilient qualities such as self- efficacy, self- control, and ability to grow helps to protect individuals in times of adversity by mobilizing protective factors to help them flourish and grow in times of adversity and in this journey of overcoming adversity grow and strengthen their resolve, performance, and confidence as a subsequent benefit.

Smith (2021) outlines six primary areas to help foster resilience:

1. Mindfulness – pause, assess the situation, and think about how best to respond.
2. Positive Appraisal – seeing self as resilient and finding ways to cope to reset.
3. Perseverance – not giving up.
4. Self-efficacy – belief in self we have what it takes to be resilient.
5. Meaning and purpose – involves creating a life worth living.
6. Social support – leaning on networks of support and letting them help.

*Activity - Can you also remember three good things that happened following the event noted above? Is there one of these things I can make happen again in the future?*

## **Conclusion**

There are many aspects that contribute and overlap when looking mental toughness, motivation, and resilience. As a consultant, the fundamental aspects to incorporate is to truly understand your client – assess their strengths, areas for growth, motivation, mindset, and work with them to create a plan to help them achieve their best performance/self. Make the plan contextually relevant, clear in what you want to achieve, clear in why it is important, and how they should do it, and make it fun (Gonzalez, 2024).

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# **Mental Focus, Concentration and Distraction**

## ***Chapter 6***

### **Introduction**

This is chapter six of the Mental Skills Training (MST) curriculum focusing on the fundamental aspects of mental focus, concentration, preparing for and preventing distraction.

### **Definition of Mental Focus, Concentration and Distraction**

Mental focus involves a few different elements, one is awareness. For an athlete to perform their best, it is important for them to be aware when they are in control and when they are not in control of their arousal state, emotional state, thought process, and focus; then to develop strategies to regain control (Williams & Krane, 2021). In doing so, as Lou Pinella, a professional baseball manager stated, athletes can learn “to feel comfortable being comfortable.” Awareness and control are foundational to athletes to executing their best performance in the present moment despite adversity or distractions (Williams & Krane, 2021).

The second element of mental focus is concentration which is defined as the ability to sustain the appropriate focus for a required period of time (Hodge & McKenzie, 1996). Developing concentration that is relevant to the athlete, their sport, skill level, and position is key. Often times, failure in performance can be linked to a diversion in concentration (Keegan, 2014). Like technical skills in sport, concentration can be learned with integrated practice and consistency.

Williams & Krane (2021) highlighted different types of concentration identified by Nideffer (1976) where he describes four dimensions of attention relevant to the athlete's position/sport: assess, perform, analyze, and rehearse within four dimensions noted as external, internal, broad, and narrow. Within the external broad quadrant, athletes are required to develop the ability to have awareness of a large external area to make a narrow-focused skill (e.g., a quarterback reading the field to make a pass); they also need to be able to shift focus depending on the variables around them (e.g., defensive tackle); in the external narrow quadrant, athletes are required to narrow their concentration to focus on a smaller area (e.g., basketball guard blocking opponent); in the broad internal focus the athlete to plan to make a shot (e.g., golfers deciding what club to use); then shift to narrow external focus to practice making the swing; then shifting to broad internal focus after the shot to evaluate. Incorporating the central aspects of concentration relevant to the sport the athlete needs to work on is key (Williams & Krane, 2021).

Distractions are elements that draw the athlete's attention away from their task/training and often presents as intrusive thoughts, change in environment, change in routine, expectations, physiological changes, and other unexpected circumstances.

Helping the athlete to build on their strengths and minimize their weaknesses is helpful to enhance their awareness, focus, self-control, reduce distractions/impact of adversity, and improve their overall performance.

Exact Sports (2020) developed a simple video outlining focus and concentration:

[https://youtu.be/p\\_Bq6AvtPDc?si=zZdwl3nlVC4Eqxw5](https://youtu.be/p_Bq6AvtPDc?si=zZdwl3nlVC4Eqxw5)

## Strategies to Develop Mental Focus, Concentration, and Deal with Distractions

Working with athletes to understand their level of performance, where they see their concentration breaking down (during what times, during what skills), identifying their primary distractions (type and frequency) and develop strategies that apply specifically to their sport/position.

Ken Ravizza et, al., developed a seven-step “R” structure for athletes to reference to highlight the connection of thoughts and behaviors in relation to their performance. In doing so, athletes can use to embrace the control they have over their own reactions, behaviors, thoughts, and attitudes and the impact they have on their performance:

- *Responsibility* – athletes taking accountability for their performance via self-control.
- *Recognize* – internal and external factors that impact their performance (e.g., distractions).
- *Release* – disruptions from optimal performance; letting things go.
- *Regroup* – adjusting composure and grounding/centering.
- *Refocus* – positive, process-oriented, in the present, task-focused cues.
- *Ready* – create a physical signal to center and focus on their task at hand (e.g., ready position).
- *Respond* – trust their training and automate their skill execution in that moment.

Adopting the seven R’s helps athletes to utilize their awareness to help focus on their task at hand, minimize distractions, and execute their best performance (Williams & Krane, 2021). This structure can be applied by the consultant and athlete to address these identified areas and incorporate them into a performance plan (e.g., pre-performance routines and post-performance

routines) incorporating contextually relevant mental skills such as imagery. Practicing consistent pre-performance routines help to automate their performance so they simply execute their task/skill versus thinking in the moment and then executing the skill in the moment.

## **Application**

An example of applied application of these concepts will be presented in the following case study. My oldest son was an ice hockey goalie from the ages of 7-16 years. To support his training, we hired coaches and worked with him directly to develop his technical skills as a goalie but also his concentration and mental skills to enhance his ability to focus. We also utilized, unknowingly at the time, the seven R's to create a structured plan to help him enhance his performance.

He often would get distracted and frankly angry at the opposing defensemen if they were in his crease or if his own defensemen were slow to clear the puck or cleared it in front of the net (**recognize**). When he would get mad, he became internally and externally distracted which limited his performance during these times. As such, he created a routine (**responsibility**) to address his internal/external distractions e.g., anger/defence issues; he would then breath and let these go (**release**), mental focus on stopping the puck (**refocus**), which involved broad external and narrow internal focus (**regroup**), mental skills such as visualization, self-talk, and deep breathing (**refocus**), center himself in the net with his stick firmly on the ice (**ready**), trust his skills and execute when the puck is in his zone (**respond**).

A high-level breakdown of his pre-competition routines were as follows:

1. He practiced focused goalie training with a goalie coach twice a week.

2. He would do multi-sided ball exercises for 20 minutes per day and scanning/focusing – red light response activity a few times per week to increase his response time; he also did parkour twice a week for additional flexibility, calisthenics, response, fast twitch muscle development – this inherently developed concentration/focus/ability to switch and adapt quickly to new situations/obstacles.
3. He practiced positive self-talk (e.g., I am the best and can shut out anyone) pre-game and/or as thought blocking when negative thoughts entered (Williams & Krane, 2021).
4. He would always try to go to bed early pre-game and at the same pre-game meal (spaghetti and vegetables).
5. He would take deep breaths when the opponents were coming down ice and focused on the shooter.
6. If defensemen were in his crease, he would be aggressive on the crease and often “chirped them” to try to throw them off their game.
7. He would also watch video of his game post-game to evaluate areas to improve as well as videos of his favorite goalies (Luongo and Fleury) to try to incorporate their moves/plays where he could.

The incorporation of this performance plan was evident in my son’s development and performance. Lochlan’s number was 00 and he maintained a high shut out ratio (80-90%) for the last three seasons he played.

Ravizza, K (2012), created a video series to guide skill development in several parts –  
part 1:

<https://youtu.be/aKf1B98TP0w?si=dTES6BVARwE9uDBe>

Ravizza, K (2012), How to Stay Focused During Sport Competition – Part 2:

[https://youtu.be/cLwOiEMuWtA?si=\\_HB1yTRc12P7Kp5G](https://youtu.be/cLwOiEMuWtA?si=_HB1yTRc12P7Kp5G)

Ravizza, K (2012), Staying Focused during Sport – part 3:

<https://youtu.be/0uVYrdu1vpk?si=aDbQLqISzMNkweek>

## **Conclusion**

There are many aspects that contribute and overlap when looking at mental skills and concentration and focus. As a consultant, the fundamental aspects to incorporate is to truly understand your client – assess their strengths, areas to develop, and work with them to create a plan to help them achieve their best performance/self. Make the plan specific to the athlete, their sport, and position; make it simple, adaptable, flexible, and contextually relevant to where they are at to develop a training vs. trusting mindset (Gonzalez, 2024).

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# **Imagery and Visualization**

## ***Chapter 7***

### **Introduction**

This is chapter seven of the series of chapters of Mental Skills Training (MST) curriculum. In previous chapters, we outlined goals, strengths, self-talk, mental toughness, concentration, and focus' – this week, I am going to outline the definitions, theories, principles, and strategies of imagery and visualization.

### **Definition and Benefits of Imagery and Visualization**

Imagery is a skill that involves creating a vivid picture of an experience in your mind. Imagery, visualization, mental rehearsal, and mental practice are often used inter-changeably and it has been identified as one of the most utilized mental skills in sport. It involves tapping into all your senses (taste, touch, kinesthetic, auditory, visual, olfactory) to create all the elements of a performance/technique you would like to execute in successful fashion. It serves as a mechanism to simulate the activity, mentally, without participating in it physically (Weinberg & Gould, 2017).

There is a body of evolving research in the benefits of imagery and visualization, however there are many positive case studies/testimonials identifying that practicing imagery/visualization consistently can increase confidence, motivation, concentration, emotional regulation, skill acquisition/refinement, effective pre, post, during competition preparation, coping with injury/rehabilitation, and coping with adversity. There is emerging evidence to show this skill helps to prepare and prime neural circuits to develop muscle/mental memory to be able to execute skills/techniques that are practiced mentally more efficiently physically. One



model of this was created by Suinn (1993) known as visuomotor behavior rehearsal (VMBR) which combines relaxation and imagery. Others combine self-talk, relaxation, concentration, and imagery training together (Weinberg & Gould, 2017).

There are two types of imagery that athletes can develop:

- *Internal imagery* – this is a first-person view where the athlete develops a mental image of themselves completing the movement/performance from their point of view (like they are seeing themselves doing the activity with a ‘Go-Pro’ on their head). This type of imagery is generally identified to be helpful in refining/developing proper individual form of the activity.
- *External imagery* – this is a third person view where the athlete develops a mental image of their performance from an outside observer perspective (like they are watching video footage) which is identified as most helpful for fast paced aspects of the movement/team sports.

### **Strategies to Develop Imagery/Visualization**

Learning skills to develop and enhance performance is foundational to elite performance mentally and physically. It is important to understand the athlete’s level of performance, their age, their sport/position, and their perspective of their goals/abilities and anticipated adverse situations they want to prepare for. Once this is identified, the consultant and athlete can develop a plan/script to address these identified areas and incorporate them into a performance plan and accompanying routines (e.g., during practice, pre, during, and post performance routines). The imagery scripts may include relaxation, self-talk, cue words/phrases with the five W’s of the plan

- the who (level/motivation of the skill), the what (the content of the image), the where (the training environment), the when (before, during, and after competition), the why (the goal).

Holmes & Collins (2001) developed a model to guide imagery practice using the acronym PETTLEP to visualize vivid images of the following components:

- Physical – how the body feels.
- Environment – where they will be competing; what it will look and sound like.
- Task – what are the skills/techniques they will use in their performance.
- Timing – the pace/speed the skill will be performed at.
- Learning – the content of the movement.
- Emotion – anticipating how they will feel when competing and having strategies to tap into their best performance.
- Perspective – viewing from first or third person.

(Weinberg & Gould, 2017).

The video clip provides an overview of visualization/imagery tying the elements noted above together <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VHISQ6xIGZE>

## **Application**

Many well-known athletes practice imagery as part of their consistent routines. These vivid mental images provide simulated practice during their “off time” from physical practice. It is recommended athlete’s practice imagery training three to four times weekly for 15-30 minutes in various locations (Williams & Krane, 2021).

In effort to make application easier for my future work, I developed an acronym to guide imagery tool development with future athletes using the word FOCUS (Bishop, J, 2024):

- F – find your target – visualize being in the right place, at the right time, doing the right things
- O – open your mind – relax and tap into all of your senses and create a vivid image of all aspects of the move you want to perform
- C – concentrate – zone your attention in on executing the movements successfully; create controllable images for yourself
- U – unload your distractions – take a deep breath in to control your emotions, breath out any negative thoughts/feelings and imagine the perfect outcome for your performance
- S – simulate success – image your best plays over and over until it becomes automatic in your mind; savor and enjoy your ideal reality

Attached is a sample script and evaluation form to provide a sample to reference for future use with clients.



The video link below provides a demonstration of an Olympic biathlon athlete using visualization to help him prepare for competition:

[https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=how+to+conquer+an+olympic+biathalon](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=how+to+conquer+an+olympic+biathalon)

I have also included a presentation for reference highlight all aspects noted above for reference.



2024 02 23 NEW  
FOCUS presentation

## **Conclusion**

There are many aspects that contribute and overlap when looking at mental skills as a whole and many compliment one another and have a scaffolding effect in athletic performance development.

As a consultant, the fundamental aspects to incorporate is to truly understand your client – assess their strengths, areas to develop, and work with them to create a plan to help them achieve their best performance/self. Make the plan specific to the athlete, their sport, and position; make it simple, adaptable, flexible, and contextually relevant to where they are at to develop a training vs. trusting mindset (Gonzalez, 2024).

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# Performance States

## *Chapter 8*

### **Introduction**

In previous chapters, we outlined goals, strengths, self-talk, mental toughness, concentration, focus, imagery, and visualization. In chapter eight, I am going to outline the definitions, theories, principles, and strategies of performance states.

### **Definition and Benefits of Performance States**

Understanding performance states and effectively managing anxiety, arousal, and emotional management is central to optimal performance. Finding the optimal level of arousal and being able to stay in the moment is key and unique to every athlete. We will walk through the terms, models, and strategies to guide this process in athletic performance development.

Defining all the terms and models is the first step in identifying what they are to better understand how they can be applied, with whom, when, and why.

- *Arousal* is the blend of physical and psychological aspects of an individual and the intensity of the individual's motivation in a specific moment (Weinberg & Gould, 2017).
- *Anxiety* is a negative emotional state that activates arousal in the system, much of which is negative and unpleasant; there are several types of anxiety:
  - Cognitive anxiety – worrisome thoughts
  - Somatic anxiety – physical activation of the negative emotional state

- State anxiety – an every-changing state of anxiety activated by the level of arousal with a behavioural disposition.
- Trait anxiety – part of the individual's personality with a behavioral disposition

Understanding the level and type of anxiety an individual has is important – the Competitive State Anxiety Inventory 2 may be used to work with the individual to understand where they are at. This tool is helpful to help the athlete and consultant to be clear in how they perceive anxiety to inform helpful routines and strategies to harness that anxiety into productive energy and focus on athletic performance (Weinberg & Gould, 2019). Also, have the athlete describe their best performance, what that looked like, what it felt like in their body, what it felt like mentally, and what routines they used to lead up and use during those moments and have them write this out.

Once you understand where the individual is at with their anxiety, review the various theories with the individual to see which one best fits. The two that resonate most are the inverted U and the IZOF models.

In these two models, as consultant, I describe a simple model for the individual to work with to see which one makes the most sense. The inverted U shows the relationship between arousal and performance (on the low/low end, performance will be poor and on the high/high end, performance will be low and, in the middle, will be the individual's optimal performance zone. Then we will map out what trigger's low arousal, high arousal, and optimal arousal zones on the inverted U diagram.

The IZOF model builds on this but includes a more specific description and application of this specific to the individual's identified zones of performance based on factors they identify. Often times, if an individual is highly stressed, they will fall will shut down or be in the hypo arousal end or left hand side of the inverted U or they will be hyper aroused and fall on the right hand side of the inverted U – how the individual interprets their level of arousal and their perspective on their emotions during that time (positive or negative) will impact their performance (Weinberg & Gould, 2019).

To assess their anxiety using the Sport Competition Anxiety Test (SCAT), after reviewing, describing, informing and confirming consent, we define anxiety and how they perceive it, map it out on the inverted U, understand and positively frame how their anxiety can be used to enhance their anxiety and develop strategies to bring them into the optimal arousal state and we would review the concepts of arousal and anxiety with the athlete – this is a quick video that provides a general overview in simple terms.

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?si=yU1uPSotu1Ok6ZW1&v=umKwGUqltOQ&feature=youtu.be>

Once I understand the athlete's perspective and what routines/practices currently work for them, we would leverage those and create new routines that are contextually meaningful for them to further enhance their performance by including skills highlighted in previous chapters such as relaxation, mindfulness, positive self-talk, goal setting, visualization, and continued practice/refinement as we go.

The athlete and I also identify areas of challenge/adversity to develop routines to enhance coping during times of adversity. Developing scripts to fit the situation to help to focus in the moment to remove their focus from something negative to their ideal state will help them enhance performance.



In effort to make application easier for my future work, I developed an acronym to guide imagery tool development with future athletes using the word FOCUS (Bishop, J, 2024):

- F – find your target – visualize being in the right place, at the right time, doing the right things
- O – open your mind – relax and tap into all of your senses and create a vivid image of all aspects of the move you want to perform
- C – concentrate – zone your attention in on executing the movements successfully; create controllable images for yourself
- U – unload your distractions – take a deep breath in to control your emotions, breath out any negative thoughts/feelings and imagine the perfect outcome for your performance
- S – simulate success – image your best plays over and over until it becomes automatic in your mind; savor and enjoy your ideal reality

The FOCUS script will be designed with the athlete; however some strategies may include using an elastic band on their wrist for them to snap when they feel stressed to remind them to stay focused and create a script for them to focus on their positive mindset (e.g., I am a beast and I can do hard things and defeat anyone who gets in my way). The time spent to build skills will be focused on 80% on the positive and 20% preparing for adversity. Having this go-to script/tools to stay focused is key to enhance performance.



## **Conclusion**

There are many aspects that contribute and overlap when looking at mental skills as a whole and many compliment one another and have a scaffolding effect in athletic performance development. Helping athletes use the right tools at the right time for the right impact is key.

As a consultant, the fundamental aspects to incorporate is to truly understand your client – assess their strengths, areas to develop, and work with them to create a plan to help them achieve their best performance/self. Make the plan specific to the athlete, their sport, and position; make it simple, adaptable, flexible, and contextually relevant to where they are at to develop a training vs. trusting mindset (Gonzalez, 2024).

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performance. 8<sup>th</sup> Ed. McGraw-Hill.

# **Handling Performance Errors and Setbacks**

## ***Chapter 9***

### **Introduction**

This is part nine of ten chapters providing an overview of handling performance errors and setbacks. In previous chapters of the Mental Skills Training (MST) curriculum, we outlined goals, strengths, self-talk, mental toughness, concentration, focus, imagery, visualization, and anxiety, arousal, emotional management, and performance states.

### **Understanding Performance Errors and Setbacks**

Understanding the perspective of the athlete and the impact of the identified performance error and setback is important to match/develop effective approaches to help athletes deal with their errors and setbacks and break them into key elements that are distilled into the simplest, most meaningful approach for the athlete.

One strategy to consider is to implement a challenge appraisal vs. stress appraisal to reframe a debilitating perspective into a facilitative one by evaluating with the athlete how they could increase practice and growth. We would need to understand what needs to change to what strengths/assets they must build upon using a resilience building approach (Weinberg & Gould, 2019).

I would be proactive with mental and physical routines using simple and applicable strategies that are intentionally aligned with the athlete's identified issue. Working to draw out the strengths/traits of the athlete to build out a plan that they co-design and think would be helpful.

I would start by:

- Understanding the problem from the athlete's perspective.
- Discovering what has and hasn't worked in the past and what their motivation is.
- Identify with the athlete what they can control and get out of their head - to identify the controllable; and focus on that not on the outcome.
- Identify 1-2 tools to help the nerves depending on the issue - likely look at using relaxation/breathing and visualization.
- Help them to set process goals they want to hit and show off and arousal – positive view.
- Journal feedback/impact of skills.

Once we identify their strengths, challenges and skills that are matched to address them, I would work with the athlete on a weekly basis (or reasonable frequency according to their schedule) to teach the skills (e.g., deep breathing and visualization) and practice them in various practice/competitive environments (if possible) pre, during and post competition; evaluate and refocus as needed based on the athlete's feedback.

I have developed a “GO TIME” worksheet and acronym to leverage their strengths to overcome performance and setbacks as well as develop consistency in their best performance. I am going to break down each element that can be customized to the athlete's perspective, performance, and development opportunities. This worksheet provides tips to support a growth mindset, resilience, and healthy habits to help guide overcoming errors, setbacks, and continue to achieve optimal performance.

**G**rowth Mindset: Embrace challenges as opportunities for learning. Embrace challenges

opportunities for learning; foster a belief that abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work. Practice this as much as you do physical skills! This video by Jocko Willick (25, January 2016) Good <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IdTMDpizis8> is a sample of a video/mantra that may support a growth mindset to incorporate after a performance set-back.

**O**ptimize Confidence: Visualize success, reflect on best performance/interactions and practice - do

more of what went right and learn from all experiences! Celebrate successes everyday. Encouraging athletes to practice confidence guided meditation is one approach that may fit for some athletes by Meditation for athletes: the basics (22 June, 2021 MindStrong), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xh2LiCCNeo> is a sample of a guided meditation intended to promote confidence.

- Create a visualization practice to implement in practice, pre-performance, and during competition; this is a sample visualization video to provide a sample of the elements to consider in a visualization practice for reference.
  - Visualize your success – what does that feel like, look like, smell like, taste like, what thoughts are putting me in the right state of mind?

This video by the New York Times – Inside an Olympic Athlete’s Mind provides an example of visualization and the elements to consider in script development.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uzpOfOjkbBw>

**T**alk/Timing: Practice positive self-talk, intentional conversations with yourself and others as a

way of staying focused and overcoming errors.

- Make positive self-talk script/phrase you can practice saying each day.

A video that provides an overview of steps to develop a personal self-talk script is noted here by Spencer. J. (2012) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0xy3WRe88Wk>

**I**nvest: Time and practice to develop healthy habits, routines to build positive thought, relational, emotional, health, relationships, and spiritual practices. Develop a consistent routine and establish healthy habits and routines (mind, body, spirit, relationships) to enhance consistency for optimum performance Ravizza, K. (26 September, 2012) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rAw9Eu4XwAw> provides strategies to help develop healthy routines to promote optimal performance.

**M**otivation: remind yourself WHAT you are doing, WHY you are doing, and WHY it matters to you! Make it fun for yourself as much as possible. It's GO TIME - create your own victory!

- What is your WHY? What is the meaning you draw from your work and your activities?
- Identify your focus and your priorities

**E**motionaI Regulation: Recognize and manage emotions. Delay immediate gratification/path of least resistance. Incorporating relaxation, deep breathing, and gratitude can help to support this practice. The following video outlines how to regulate one's self to achieve optimal sport performance by Ravizza, K. (26 September, 2012) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUj7\\_2Wo3ME](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUj7_2Wo3ME)



Go Time worksheet  
(1).docx

Assessing the athlete and identifying their error, setback, perspective, and appropriate skill to address the error/setback is key to meaningful change. The content above and attached

worksheet are intended to provide a menu of options to consider to customize/apply in a way that is contextually relevant to the athlete.

## **Conclusion**

There are many aspects that contribute and overlap when looking at mental skills as a whole and many compliment one another and have a scaffolding effect in athletic performance development. Helping athletes use the right tools at the right time for the right impact is key.

As a consultant, the fundamental aspects to incorporate is to truly understand your client – assess their strengths, areas to develop, and work with them to create a plan to help them achieve their best performance/self. Make the plan specific to the athlete, their sport, and position; make it simple, adaptable, flexible, and contextually relevant to where they are at to develop a training vs. trusting mindset (Gonzalez, 2024).



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## **Use of Assessments and Technology**

### ***Chapter 10***

#### **Introduction**

This is the final chapter of the introductory overview of Mental Skills Training (MST) curriculum. In previous chapters, we outlined several mental skills such as athletic identity, routines, self-talk/self-efficacy, goal setting, mental toughness, concentration, imagery/visualization, managing anxiety, arousal, emotional regulation, and handling performance errors/setbacks. In this chapter, I am going to outline the definitions, theories, principles, and the use of assessments and technology in mental skills training.

#### **Overview of Use of Assessments and Technology in MST**

##### ***Assessment in MST***

Assessment (definition, Oxford) "... to evaluate the nature, ability, or quality of..." in this case athletic skill, age, level of performance, physical, and mental attributes in their sport.

Assessment and technology tools are rapidly evolving and can be helpful to support mental skills and developing optimal performance. Fundamental questions that come to mind when considering choosing/utilizing a tool or device to aid in athletic development are:

1. Will this tool be helpful to the athlete?
2. Is the tool reliable and accurate?
3. Is the consultant fully aware of the ethical considerations in the tools use/application?
4. Is the consultant trained and competent in the use/application of the tools selected?

5. Has the athlete been fully informed and consented to the use of the tool and results gathered?

Considering ethics in making these decisions is critical. Forrester-Miller & Davis (n.d.) provided an easy-to-follow model to guide ethical decision making:

- Identify the problem - gather as much objective and subjective information from the athlete as you can regarding a potential ethical issue. This would require consultants to be fully aware and informed of the benefits and risks of any tool selected to support the athlete.
- Apply your code of ethics (ACA referenced) - consider all professional codes/ethics necessary to inform your decision to utilize technology/assessment/results in your work with clients.
- Determine the nature and dimensions of the issue - examine the implications of the fundamental principles for ethical decision making (e.g.. autonomy, justice, beneficence, non-maleficence, and fidelity; review relevant literature; and consult with other professionals who have experience with the tool/practice you are considering.
- Generate potential courses of action - brainstorm potential scenarios, benefits and risks, and discuss with a trusted colleague with expertise in this area to inform your choices especially if you are considering new technology.
- Consider potential consequences of all options and best course of action.
- Evaluate the selected course of action and weigh if it meets the test of justice, publicity, universality (Stadler, 1986)
- Implement the course of action - evaluate and adjust as necessary.

Williams & Krane (2021) note there are a multitude of possibilities when developing mental skills training programs. Ensuring the program is effective requires thorough assessment, planning, and contextually relevant strategies that make sense to the athlete and their mental/physical performance enhancement. Completing a thorough assessment with the athlete helps the consultant to work with the athlete to identify and reveal areas for development (both strengths and areas for growth) which is inclusive of the physiological aspects, biomechanics, strategy, and psychological aspects via a combination of oral interviews, written psychological inventories, and behavioral observation. Orlick (2016) outlines initial and performance planning forms to guide this process. Woodcock et, al (2012) recommend a battery of psychometric tests for consultants to use to assess athlete's mental skills (e.g., Competitive State Anxiety Inventory-2 (Martens, Vealey, & Burton, 1990), State and Trait Sport Confidence Inventory (Vealy, 1986) as noted in Williams & Krane (2021). They note when selecting tools noted, it is important that they are valid and reliable for the athlete and their sport, the consultant fully explains the purpose and use of the information to ensure confidentiality and informed consent (Welfel, 2016).

### ***Use of Technology in MST***

As noted above, the same assessment and ethical considerations need to be made when selecting technological tools to help enhance athletic performance. There are many new technological advancements to develop and/or reinforce a variety of mental and physical skills as such as consultants we need to monitor the research and evidence-based practice is important to ensure the tools selected meet the ethical and contextual relevance for the athlete. I only going to highlight two examples of technology I am familiar with. One uses brain biofeedback (Neurofeedback) to enhance attention called HeartMath.

<https://youtu.be/1rstC0X20X2ac?si=QIWdmDnrNz9jDARs>

This tool helps to promote relaxation, concentration, reduce anxiety, and promote performance. This tool helps to reduce arousal (anxiety) using focus, breathing to provide biofeedback (heart and respiration rate) via a sensor/monitor. The one exercise I most often used was the visual video of a hot air balloon - participants to practice deep breathing and focus to control the height of the balloon which is monitored by the pulse reader. This is a valuable tool to use with athletes who struggle with anxiety and would benefit from a multi-modal method to refine focusing and relaxation as part of their MST program.

Another is a device that helps to focus and refocus skills to promote reaction speed, hand-eye coordination, and concentration. In my recreational sport of boxing, and with young athletes I am starting to work with, we use Blaze Pods to help develop boxing accuracy, speed, and focus. A short video demonstrating this is noted below.

<https://youtube.com/shorts/AejsNOCz98E?si=kSXUeKtMklIP6zpT>

This is an example of how technology can be applied to enhance mental skills in the areas identified above. These tools can help create an interactive activity with athletes to enhance their 'buy in' and provide them with immediate feedback (visual/biophysical) to demonstrate their skill in action.

## **Conclusion**

There are many aspects that contribute and overlap when looking at implementing mental skills. As a consultant, the fundamental aspects to incorporate is to truly understand your client – assess their strengths, areas for growth, motivation, mindset, and work with them to create a plan to help them achieve their best performance/self. Make the plan contextually relevant, clear in

what you want to achieve, clear in why it is important, and how they should do it, and make it fun (Gonzalez, 2024).

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## **Closing Summary**

Helping athletes develop foundational mental skills that are intentional, contextual, and consistent mental training methods requires commitment, understanding, and self-discipline. As consultants, helping athletes to tap into their best, when this is done in an empowering, flexible way that is meaningful and fun for the athlete, they can reach their goals and dreams (Williams & Krane, 2021).