

## **Imagery and Visualization**

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We have all spent time as a child “day dreaming”. That is, we let our thoughts drift off in a directed fantasy that seems very real and satisfying. As a professional athlete you can use this technique to improve athletic performance, focus your attention, and eliminate distractions. You can learn to visualize and direct your activity with positive outcomes, repetitions, and practice, with all of the feelings, both physical and emotional, that you desire in actual competition.

Before you begin your visualization, take a moment to explore these questions.

First you must understand how you visualize. Do you see yourself as if you were watching yourself on a movie screen, or are you actually in the activity, as if you had a camera on your head? Are you using all of your senses, that is, your sense of not only sight (visual), sound (auditory), and touch/feelings (kinesthetic), but also your sense of smell and even taste? Do you visualize in color or black and white. Are you able to recreate events that you have experienced and can you create new events as you visualize. The more modalities (senses) you can incorporate into your visualization, the more “real” it becomes and the more powerful it will be.

What is it you really want to rehearse by using visualization? Your visualization should be specific and include all of the sights, sounds, feelings both external and internal, smells, and tastes that will occur while in a specific situation. You should be able to identify clearly how you want to behave (perform), think (internal dialogue) and feel ( emotional state). You should include specific details of the situation. You should be successful in the situation. It should be “perfect practice” to carry over into your game.

Before you begin your visualization, you should first practice relaxation. By being fully relaxed and without distractions, your mind will be free to fully experience your visualization. Find a comfortable position, either a chair, recliner, or sofa. Begin by slow, deep, rhythmic breaths, inhaling and exhaling at a consistent pace. Begin by starting your relaxation at the top of your head and feeling (visualizing) with each breath that relaxation progressing down through your neck, shoulders, arms, back, legs and all the way down to your feet. When you are fully relaxed your mind will be free of distractions and ready to receive your visualization.

Practice with situations that are less stressful than your athletic performance and evaluate your results. Have fun with it! Once you are comfortable with this technique, then you can begin your visualization and make it a part of your regular training program.