

St. Vincent Hospital
Sport & Performance Psychology Program

MENTAL TRAINING MANUAL

**Guide to Improving Mental Concentration
and Performance**

Prepared by:

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INTRODUCTION

The following pages include mental training techniques and suggestions that can assist athletes (high school, collegiate, elite) in the development of optimal mental preparation. These techniques originate from professionals in the sport psychology field who have worked with athletes from the collegiate arena to the Olympic level. As with any new skill, these techniques must be practiced and repeated for the athlete to gain any benefits. If not practiced, the athlete will find frustration and anxiety as the only results. However, with the successful practice and use of these techniques, each athlete can gain command over his or her psychological preparation for athletic performance, as well as providing mental skills for endeavors outside of the athletic arena.

I have included in this brief manual sections on relaxation training, the use of visual imagery, goal-setting techniques, stress management skills, and a summary for a total individualized mental training program. Only those athletes who commit themselves to this program will observe any benefits. I hope that each athlete who reads this manual identifies the benefit to their athletic and personal enhancement. If you find that mental training can assist you in your athletic preparation, then I wish you much success with implementing this program. If you have any questions or would like to schedule a confidential appointment, please call me at (317)338.3103.

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GOAL-SETTING TECHNIQUES

This section will require you to follow some general questions in order to establish goals for your upcoming competitive season. Goals are often the unconscious motivators for our athletic and academic endeavors; they propel us to achieve. The problem with setting goals is that we are often unrealistic or doubtful; we either set goals too high or too low. If our goals are too high, we get frustrated and don't give the required effort because we believe we can't achieve them. If our goals are too low, they become easy and therefore don't require our optimal amount of effort. Goals, therefore, should be just high enough to be accomplished, with short-term goals being realistically accomplished with the span of a season. For example, I may have a goal of finishing in the top 10 at three world cup events. Initially, however, I may set short-term goals based on small incremental increases over my present performance. So, if I have yet to finish in the top 10 at a world cup event, I may set my goals on an event-by-event basis, based on my current times. The basic task of proper goal-setting is to have some sense of achievement in completion of goals; therefore we can maintain our motivation throughout the hard times. The goal is to establish optimal and realistic goals. Follow these guidelines to establish both your short-term and long-term goals.

PROCEDURE

1. Begin by writing on a separate sheet of paper the goals you wish to achieve athletically for this upcoming season. These should include short-term goals (measured early in the season) and long-term goals (measured at the end of the season).
2. Make sure that your goals are measurable: that is, make sure that you can keep track of your progress and evaluate them by some type of standard (e.g. training runs completed, times for events, etc.)
3. On the same sheet of paper, write at least 3 academic/vocational and personal goals for the upcoming year. These include desired GPA, study hours, work-related achievements (e.g. promotions), personal growth issues (e.g. social skills, time management), and self-esteem enhancement such as taking care of yourself by reading, non-competitive exercise, and sharing time with others.
4. Write these goals on the same sheet of paper; even better, write your goals in a notebook that you can keep during the year as a personal mental training manual. Remember, you want to be able to measure your goals and keep a track of your accomplishments during the year.
5. When you accomplish your short-term goals, re-evaluate your goals and establish new ones. If you are consistently achieving your short-term goals with little effort, then they may be too easy. It is important that by setting goals, you learn

how to *stretch your efforts toward the pursuit of optimal performance.*

6. Some athletes have found it useful to make a poster with their goals written on it. This poster can then be placed in your bedroom, dorm room, or locker space (wherever it can be seen daily and regularly). This often allows the athlete to constantly visualize his or her goals; through visual repetition, the athlete maintains the level of motivation necessary to achieve the goals.

REMEMBER: Goals must be realistic and measurable; goals such as "feel good about myself" are not truly measurable unless one can identify what specifically must happen in order to "feel good" about oneself. Taking one hour a day to read, or taking 15 minutes a day to just walk are some examples of measurable self-esteem goals: you either did or didn't do them....

RELAXATION TRAINING

The purpose of this section is to familiarize you with a basic relaxation procedure that will help you to gain control over your muscular tension before, during, and after athletic competition. Knowing how to relax can be used if you feel tense or tight prior to or during competition. Finally, achieving the relaxation response is essential for the other mental training techniques to be accomplished; relaxation provides the foundation for effective mental readiness. Competitive athletes must recognize how to control their energies before, during, and after their events.

PROCEDURE

First you must practice this technique at least once a day to obtain desirable effects. You want to be able to learn to achieve the relaxation response without going through the entire procedure as described below. Second, you must be lying in a comfortable position and in a quiet environment when first learning relaxation techniques. Once the skill is developed, you will be able to relax in the middle of loud and noisy environments. Initially, it is best to practice this in the evenings prior to going to bed. Finally, once you have gotten comfortable with the following procedure, you should begin practicing a shortened version for yourself that you can use immediately prior to competition. The relaxation procedure should be as follows:

1. Once you have gotten comfortable lying down, begin to focus on *deep and rhythmic (slow) breathing*...you may want to listen to music, but it should not have any lyrics...for example, surf sounds or new age (i.e. Narada) can be used...
2. ...As you are slowing your breathing down, *imagine all of the tension leaving your body, as if it were flowing out onto the bed*....
3.Beginning with the muscles in your face, *tense the muscles*....*hold for 2 to 3 seconds*....*then relax*....you should notice the difference between tension and relaxation...
4.Repeat the *tension...relaxation* with the muscles in your face....
5.Now focus on the muscles in the neck...*tense...relax...and repeat*...
6.Now focus on the muscles in the shoulders...*tense...relax...repeat*...notice how the relaxation *flows like a warmth from your face through your neck and down into your shoulders*....
7.Concentrate on the muscles in your arms...*tense...relax...repeat*...remember to focus on letting the relaxing flow run down through your arms and out your fingertips....

8.Now focus on the muscles in the abdominal (stomach) area... *tense...relax...repeat...*
9.Imagine that the top half of your body, from the head to the waist, is *completely relaxed and warm*....notice the difference between the top half and bottom half of your body.....
10.Now focus on the muscles of your upper legs (quadriceps/thighs)..... *tense...relax...repeat...*let the relaxation flow from the top half of your body down into your legs, *flowing like a warm liquid into your legs...*
11.Tighten the muscles in your lower legs (calf muscles)... *tense...relax...repeat...*force all of the tension down through your legs and out of the body through the bottom of your feet...
12.Concentrate on your breathing and *allow the warmth to spread throughout your entire body*....if you feel any tension in your body, go to that muscle and/or joint and repeat the *tense...relax...repeat...cycle*.....Allow your breathing to be slow and relaxed.....

The purpose of this exercise is for you to maintain and control the tension of your muscles. It is important that you are not overly-tensed prior to competition or performance, as that distraction will use energy that is needed for the actual competition. Practice this exercise daily; it is often helpful to keep a mental training journal to monitor comments about your practice, including the number of times you've done the exercise, how it feels, and difficulties that you encounter. This will help you to become more proficient at controlling your own body for optimal performance.

IMAGERY TRAINING

The purpose of imagery, or visualization, is for the athlete to be able to visualize or "see" his or her performance in a practice or actual competitive situation. By imagining successful practice and competition, the athlete can gain confidence in his or her skills. Be cautious, however, that negative images (visualizing failure, for example) almost always produce negative results. Thus, it is important for you to believe in yourself and establish successful and realistic goals for imagery. If you think about the best performance you've ever had, you will probably "picture" and "feel" the event; this is the purpose of developing visualization skills.

PROCEDURE

1. First, complete the relaxation procedure in order to achieve the relaxation response, or the feeling of complete relaxation....
2. When you feel completely relaxed, *imagine picturing a blank screen in your mind...* then begin to picture a setting in your mind where you are completely relaxed....for example, lying on a beach or sitting in the mountains....It must be someplace where you have been and have felt completely relaxed and tranquil...
3. Once you have pictured this place in your mind, *begin to see all of the colors and details in your mind...picture the sights, smells, sounds, and other senses of being in this place....IMAGINE THAT YOU ARE REALLY THERE....* If it helps, actually imagine touching the sand, grass, or whatever is in your quiet place...
4. When you feel completely relaxed and tranquil while imagining yourself in your quiet place, you should give yourself *three positive self-statements that reflect positive aspects about yourself as an athlete and as a person...* The goal here is to establish a positive belief in yourself and in the pursuit of your own goals....
5. At the same time, begin to think of a "cue word" that reminds you of this quiet place...The cue word can be used during a competition (e.g. prior to stepping in the starting box) to help achieve brief relaxation when you are feeling your body becoming too tense....this "cue" can be used in order for you to help get the picture of your quiet place in your mind immediately prior to a competition so that you can take that brief deep breath right before the start of your race...etc....
6. After you have achieved comfort and relaxation in this quiet place, you can *visualize either a practice or performance scenario...* This will differ according to event, but the concept is the same. Whether it is a practice or actual performance scenario, the goal is to *visualize yourself successfully achieving your athletic task...* if it is getting an explosive start, for example, you should visualize yourself *successfully exploding from the line of scrimmage; starting blocks, etc.*

It is helpful to visualize both *internally and externally*....*INTERNAL IMAGERY* is visualizing yourself from your own perspective in order to experience the kinesthetic movement required for the task. For example, a place kicker should be able to feel smooth and powerful leg strength....or a wide receiver should feel the ball come into his hands....again, it should be *successful* completion of the task....*EXTERNAL IMAGERY* is the actual viewing of oneself as if you were a spectator....watching yourself complete a successful serve in a volleyball game, for example....this allows you to actually visualize and picture corrections in your tasks. Both forms of imagery are helpful, but I believe that beginners should focus on *INTERNAL* imagery to begin with, and then develop *EXTERNAL* imagery skills as they work and corrections in athletic tasks....

7. Whether it is a practice or actual competition scenario, the visualization should occur after you have established a comfortable level in your quiet place....you should be able to switch from the quiet place to picture yourself in a competitive or practice situation....that is, you again should be able to see, hear, smell, and feel all of your environment (e.g. the coolness of the air, the wind blowing through the trees, the sound of the environment, etc....). It is essential that, in your mind, you *picture the surroundings as closely as possible*. If you are imagining yourself competing in an environment that may be at another country or city, either try to recall how it looked from past experience, or have your coach or teammates describe it to you....attempt to picture it in your mind....Upon arriving at a "foreign" site, get by yourself and try to get a *mental picture* of the surroundings for your imagery exercises....
8. When you choose which event or task you will be visualizing (e.g. punt, receive of serve, start a race, etc....), you must remember to *visualize successful completion of the task*....You should see yourself doing the task correctly and with success. It may be helpful to focus on effort rather than outcome, considering that you can only control yourself and not your opponent. For example, you may want to visualize yourself setting a personal record time, rather than finishing first. When athletes describe the "flow" experience, it is usually related to the *feeling*....not the final result. It is equally important that you pay attention to *how you feel when successfully completing the task*....(e.g. *confident, poised, relaxed*..).
9. When you finish visualizing the task, you should imagine returning to your "quiet place," by either switching the mental picture or using your "cue word" (or phrase). Again, give yourself *3 positive self-statements*... (e.g. *nice job, I feel relaxed, etc*.)... This will reinforce your self-beliefs and confidence in your abilities.

REMEMBER: Visualizing a task will not give you any success in that task unless you are actually (physically) working on that task in practice and competition. You cannot

achieve success just by visualizing it; it takes hours and hours of physical practice and repetition plus visualization to successfully optimize your potential.

What mental imagery and relaxation training do is reinforce a famous adage:

"What the Mind Believes.....

The Body Achieves... "

STRESS MANAGEMENT

A competitive athlete is confronted with many stressors. Stress is represented in many forms: feeling stressed before exams because of lack of study time due to athletic involvement; or, feeling tired because of juggling practice, travel, family, and any form of social life.

Stress management is important in the healthy development of an individual. Recognizing our various stressors and stress responses that we deal with daily is essential in maintaining mental health. The following procedure is designed to help you identify stressors and manage stress via mental training techniques.

PROCEDURE

1. Using a scale from 0-10, where 0 = no stress and 10 = high stress, keep a track of daily activities where you feel stressed. For example, before taking a test or before going out on a first date, rate the level of stress that you feel about that event. These events do not have to relate to athletic performances; in fact, it is often helpful to measure non-athletic stressors in order to find out our own personal stress-style. By keeping track of stressful events, you will learn when and where to apply stress- reduction techniques.
2. Pay attention to your physiological (body) symptoms related to stress....do you feel tension in your stomach?...do your hands clench into fists?...What are your stress signs? Write this down in your mental training notebook.
3. Regarding athletic performance, rate (using your stress scale) your stress levels at various points in your sport participation. For example, what is your stress rating *during practice? After practice? One day prior to competition? One hour before competition? Immediately prior to competition?* Make sure you keep track of this in your mental training journal so you can establish patterns of athletic situational-stressors.
4. STRESS REDUCTION: The key element in reducing stress is being able to identify the stressors in your life. Once these are identified, then you can take the following steps to reduce stress:
 - >Practice relaxation training prior to stressful events
 - >Slow down physically when feeling stressed; talk slower and breath slowly--slow the body's pace down
 - >Take slow, deep breaths and focus on relaxation

>Practice self-talk to reduce stress levels and tell yourself relaxing thoughts; remember not to catastrophize your thoughts, keep everything in perspective...

>Eat healthy, and get plenty of rest...

INDIVIDUAL MENTAL TRAINING PLAN

The following steps are designed for the athlete to follow if interested in developing a mental training regimen for athletic and personal enhancement. If the individual is committed to personal and athletic excellence, and is willing to work at the previously presented procedures, then this training plan may be helpful in optimizing athletic and personal potential.

1. Get a notebook that can be used as your **Personal Mental Training Journal**. Make sure you keep this manual separate from other course materials, etc. The purpose of this manual is to log your goals, study strategies imagery exercises, and relaxation cues. Other information (e.g. motivational phrases, books, etc.) that you believe is relevant to your psychological performance may be added as needed. This manual will become your personal guide to optimal mental performance.
2. Develop a set time and place for practicing your relaxation skills; it is important that you practice these skills no less than 4-5 times per week at the beginning. Prior to actual practice and/or competitions, you can use a "one-breath" relaxation technique; this is accomplished by taking a deep breath immediately prior to your performance (e.g. standing at the free throw line....getting ready for a tennis serve....and so on). As you breathe out repeat your "cue word" that reminds you of your quiet place---don't visualize that place, just repeat the "cue word." Then quickly visualize in your mind the task you are about to perform. Remember to visualize it successfully and confidently. This brief relaxation technique is useful in setting those pre-competition 'butterflies' and negative thoughts. Remember, the goal is *don't get rid of the butterflies....teach them to fly in formation*.
3. Practice imagery of actual performance and practice during your relaxation exercises. Remember to visualize both internally and externally. Also, successful completion of the task and confidence in yourself must be visualized in your mind!!
4. Remember to evaluate, revise, and establish new short-terms goals in athletic, academic, and personal areas each week/month. The goals are only helpful when consistently evaluated and updated.
5. Get plenty of rest and allow personal time for stress reduction and management. Maintain good study habits and practice time management....this will help to reduce the amount of stressors in your life.
6. **BASK IN THE GLORY OF YOUR OWN SELF-CONTROL AND SUCCESSES;** it is

important that you affirm yourself and give yourself plenty of positive self-statements. These statements shouldn't be grandiose ("I am the best in the world"); rather, they should reinforce your own expectations and evaluations ("I know I'll give 110% in this race"). The important facet is that you believe in yourself and inspire yourself through visualizing success (via effort) and confidence. This is the goal of effective mental training.

***GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR MENTAL
PREPARATION!***