

MENTAL SKILLS FOR RUNNERS

A 10-Week Plan



MATT GOECKEL

Week 1

INTRODUCTION



What is Mental Training?

- **Mental Training is the refinement of mental skills through a systematic use of training tools to enhance performance on and off the field.**
- **Most coaches emphasize the importance of mental skills, but do not have a planned approach to develop them.**
- **The major mental skills covered in this program are: Goal setting, Mental Zones, Self-talk, Imagery/Rehearsal, Confidence, Focus, and Mental Plans**
- **Many people have misconceptions about mental training. This activity from Dr. Stanbrough's *Applying Skills in Performance Psychology* shows common myths. They will find that all the answers are false, and the activity should be followed with a discussion of why.**

Activity 1.4: Mental Skills Training Quiz		
True or False		
1. T F	Athletes are born (innate) with strong mental skills.	
2. T F	Mental skills training works immediately.	
3. T F	Mental skills training is too time consuming.	
4. T F	Mental skills training is only for psychological whackos.	
5. T F	Mental skills training is only for elite athletes.	
6. T F	Mental skills training is about performing miracles.	
7. T F	Mental skills training guarantees a top performance at the right time.	
8. T F	Mental skills training works by simply reading about it.	
9. T F	Mental skills training is a substitute for physical conditioning and technique training.	
10. T F	Mental skills training will not turn a loser into a winner.	

Physical vs Mental Training

- Just like when developing physical skills, mental training is complex. A plan must be in place, with progression over time. Performance won't change overnight, but with proper effort and patience, the skills will develop.
- Plenty of time is spent refining physical skills, but too often not much time is spent on mental training. When mental skills are of equal importance, why not train just as much mentally?

Professional use of Mental Training

- Many athletes will be skeptical of mental training. Sometimes they will need a convincing case study to prove it. MLB 3rd Baseman Evan Longoria's rise to prominence is a testament to the power of mental skills: <https://youtu.be/y3vkUm54adI>
- Have athletes find their own evidence of professional athletes using mental skills. They may find it is more common than they realize.

The Mind-Body Connection

- **Athletes may need to see the evidence of the mind-body connection for themselves before buying-in. To demonstrate, we turn to this activity from Dr. Stanbrough's *Applying Skills in Performance Psychology***

Activity 1.9: Iron Arm

Part 1: Pair off with a partner (similar heights if possible) facing each other about an arm's length apart. Partner #1 sets an arm, palm facing up, on partner #2's shoulder. Partner #2 takes his/her hands and links them around partner #1's extended arm right above the elbow. Partner #1 is instructed to tighten his/her arm as much as possible so as not to let partner #2 bend it with his/her strength downward. Let each partner take a turn in both positions before moving on.

Part 2: Repeat the scenario, but this time, have the partners imagine a strong steel bar that extends through their arm making it tight and rigid. The steel bar gives them power and makes their arm unbendable. Once this image is created, have partner #2 push down on the arm. Let each partner take a turn in both positions.

For Thought:

In part 1, were you able to bend the arm of your partner? Was your partner able to bend your arm?

In part 2, were you able to bend the arm of your partner? Was your partner able to bend your arm?

What was the difference between part 1 and part 2? Why do you believe the difference occurred?

Wrap-up:

In most cases, when the image of the steel bar is created, the arm is much stronger than when the image is not created. Just imagining the arm is an iron bar made the arm stronger. The image from the brain was transmitted to the muscles to make them stronger. Imagine how this skill could be applied to athletics to help increase performance!

Week 2

NEEDS ASSESSMENT



Why Find Needs?

- One major piece of mental training is that it is individualized. Every athlete has different proficiency levels of each skill, so finding where they are and **individualizing** their development is paramount.

Using Assessments

- Assessments can be used to find the strengths and weaknesses of each athlete.
- These two assessments, developed by Smith et al. are commonly used for identifying the mental needs of an athlete. Scoring for each is included. The first is the *Test of Performance Strategies* and the second is the *Athletic Coping Skills Inventory*

Test of Performance Strategies (TOPS)

Directions: Each of the following items describes a specific situation that you may have encountered in your training and competition. **Think back to the prime of your career**, read each statement, and circle the appropriate number to the right of the statement to indicate how you usually felt.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1. I set realistic but challenging goals for practice.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I say things to myself to help my practice performance.	1	2	3	4	5
3. During practice, I visualize successful past performances.	1	2	3	4	5
4. My attention wanders while I am training.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I practice using relaxation techniques at workouts.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I practice a way to relax.	1	2	3	4	5
7. During competition, I set specific result goals for myself.	1	2	3	4	5
8. When the pressure is on at competitions, I know how to relax.	1	2	3	4	5
9. My self-talk during competition is negative.	1	2	3	4	5
10. During practice, I don't think about performing much – I just let it happen.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I perform at competitions without consciously thinking about it.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I rehearse my performance in my mind before practice.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I can raise my energy level at competitions when necessary.	1	2	3	4	5
14. During competition, I have thoughts of failure.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I use practice time to work on my relaxation technique.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I manage my self-talk effectively during practice.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I am able to relax if I get too nervous at a competition.	1	2	3	4	5

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
18. I visualize my competition going exactly the way I want it to go.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I am able to control distracting thoughts when I am training.	1	2	3	4	5
20. I get frustrated and emotionally upset when practice does not go well.	1	2	3	4	5
21. I have specific cue words or phrases that I say to myself to help my performance during competition.	1	2	3	4	5
22. I evaluate whether I achieve MY competition goals.	1	2	3	4	5
23. During practice, MY movements and skills just seem to flow naturally from one to another.	1	2	3	4	5
24. When I make a mistake in competition, I have trouble getting my concentration back on track.	1	2	3	4	5
25. When I need to, I can relax myself at competitions to get ready to perform.	1	2	3	4	5
26. I set very specific goals for competition.	1	2	3	4	5
27. I relax myself at practice to get ready.	1	2	3	4	5
28. I psych myself up at competitions to get ready to perform.	1	2	3	4	5
29. At practice, I can allow the whole skill or movement to happen naturally without concentrating on each part of the skill.	1	2	3	4	5
30. During competition, I perform on 'automatic pilot'.	1	2	3	4	5
31. When something upsets me during a competition, my performance suffers.	1	2	3	4	5
32. I keep my thoughts positive during competitions.	1	2	3	4	5
33. I say things to myself to help my competitive performance.	1	2	3	4	5
34. At competitions, I rehearse the feel of my performance in my imagination.	1	2	3	4	5
35. I practice a way to energize myself.	1	2	3	4	5
36. I manage my self-talk effectively during competition.	1	2	3	4	5
37. I set goals to help me use practice time effectively.	1	2	3	4	5

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
38. I have trouble energizing myself if I feel sluggish during practice.	1	2	3	4	5
39. When things are going poorly in practice, I stay in control of myself emotionally.	1	2	3	4	5
40. I do what needs to be done to get psyched up for competitions.	1	2	3	4	5
41. During competition, I don't think about performing much - I just let it happen.	1	2	3	4	5
42. At practice, when I visualize my performance, I imagine what it will feel like.	1	2	3	4	5
43. I find it difficult to relax when I am too tense at competitions.	1	2	3	4	5
44. I have difficulty increasing my energy level during workouts.	1	2	3	4	5
45. During practice, I focus my attention effectively.	1	2	3	4	5
46. I set personal performance goals for a competition.	1	2	3	4	5
47. I motivate myself to train through positive self-talk.	1	2	3	4	5
48. During practice, sessions I just seem to be in a flow.	1	2	3	4	5
49. I practice energizing myself during training sessions.	1	2	3	4	5
50. I have trouble maintaining my concentration during long practices.	1	2	3	4	5
51. I talk positively to myself to get the most out of practice.	1	2	3	4	5
52. I can increase my energy to just the right level for competitions.	1	2	3	4	5
53. I have very specific goals for practice.	1	2	3	4	5
54. During competition, I play/perform instinctively with little conscious effort.	1	2	3	4	5
55. I imagine my competitive routine before I do it at a competition.	1	2	3	4	5
56. I imagine screwing up during a competition.	1	2	3	4	5
57. I talk positively to myself to get the most out of competitions.	1	2	3	4	5
58. I don't set goals for practices, I just go out and do it.	1	2	3	4	5

		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
59.	I rehearse my performance in my mind and at competitions.	1	2	3	4	5
60.	I have trouble controlling my emotions when things are not going well at practice.	1	2	3	4	5
61.	When I perform poorly in practice, I lose my focus.	1	2	3	4	5
62.	My emotions keep me from performing my best at competitions.	1	2	3	4	5
63.	My emotions get out of control under the pressure of competition.	1	2	3	4	5
64.	At practice, when I visualize my performance, I imagine watching myself as if on a video replay.	1	2	3	4	5

Scoring

TOPS is a 64-item inventory that is scored as 16 separate subscales, 8 measuring practice usage and 8 measuring competitive usage of mental training tools and skills. All scales are scored by summing the 4 items, but 1-2 items on 4 subscales are reverse scored.

Reverse scoring means that the score that is summed to get the subscale total is reversed from the item actually circled. Thus, on a five-point scale, a 1 is scored as a 5, a 2 is scored as a 4, 3 stays the same, 4 is scored as a 2, and 5 is scored as a 1. (i.e. 1=5, 2=4, 3=3, 4=2, and 5=1). (R) means the item is reverse scored.

PRACTICE SUBSCALES

Goal Setting = Item 1 + Item 37 + Item 53 + Item 58 (R)

Emotional Control = Item 20 + Item 39 + Item 60 + Item 61

Automaticity = Item 10 + Item 23 + Item 29 + Item 48

Relaxation = Item 5 + Item 6 + Item 15 + Item 27

Self-Talk = Item 2 + Item 16 + Item 47 + Item 51

Imagery = Item 3 + Item 12 + Item 42 + Item 64

Attention Control = Item 4 (R) + Item 19 + Item 45 + Item 50 (R)

Activation = Item 35 + Item 38 + Item 44 + Item 49

COMPETITIVE SUBSCALES

Goal Setting = Item 7 + Item 22 + Item 26 (R) + Item 46

Emotional Control = Item 24 + Item 31 + Item 62 + Item 63

Automaticity = Item 11 + Item 30 + Item 41 + Item 54

Relaxation = Item 8 + Item 17 + Item 25 + Item 43

Self-Talk = Item 21 + Item 33 + Item 36 + Item 57

Imagery = Item 18 + Item 34 + Item 55 + Item 59

Positive Thinking = Item 9 (R) + Item 14 (R) + Item 32 + Item 56 (R)

Activation = Item 13 + Item 28 + Item 40 + Item 52

Athletic Coping Skills Inventory

Instructions: The following are statements that athletes have used to describe their experiences. Please read each statement carefully, and then recall as accurately as possible how often you experience the same thing. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any one statement.

Please circle how often you have these experiences when playing sports.

		0	1	2	3
1	On a daily or weekly basis, I set very specific goals for myself that guide what I do.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
2	I get the most out of my talent and skill.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
3	When a coach or manager tells me how to correct a mistake I've made, I tend to take it personally and feel upset.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
4	When I'm playing sports, I can focus my attention and block out distractions.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
5	I remain positive and enthusiastic during competition, no matter how badly things are going.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
6	I tend to play better under pressure because I think more clearly.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
7	I worry quite a bit about what others think of my performance.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
8	I tend to do lots of planning about how to reach my goals.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
9	I feel confident that I will play well.	Almost	Sometimes	Often	Almost

		never		always
10	When a coach or manager criticizes me, I become upset rather than feel helped.	Almost never	Sometimes Often	Almost always
11	It is easy for me to keep distracting thoughts from interfering with something I am watching or listening to.	Almost never	Sometimes Often	Almost always
12	I put a lot of pressure on myself by worrying about how I will perform.	Almost never	Sometimes Often	Almost always
13	I set my own performance goals for each practice.	Almost never	Sometimes Often	Almost always
14	I don't have to be pushed to practice or play hard; I give 100%.	Almost never	Sometimes Often	Almost always
15	If a coach criticizes or yells at me, I correct the mistake without getting upset about it.	Almost never	Sometimes Often	Almost always
16	I handle unexpected situations in my sport very well.	Almost never	Sometimes Often	Almost always
17	When things are going badly, I tell myself to keep calm, and this works for me.	Almost never	Sometimes Often	Almost always
18	The more pressure there is during a game, the more I enjoy it.	Almost never	Sometimes Often	Almost always
19	While competing, I worry about making mistakes or failing to come through.	Almost never	Sometimes Often	Almost always
20	I have my own game plan worked out in my head long before the game begins.	Almost never	Sometimes Often	Almost always

21	When I feel myself getting too tense, I can quickly relax my body and calm myself.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
22	To me, pressure situations are challenges that I welcome.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
23	I think about and imagine what will happen if I fail or screw up.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
24	I maintain emotional control regardless of how things are going for me.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
25	It is easy for me to direct my attention and focus on a single object or person.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
26	When I fail to reach my goals, it makes me try even harder.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
27	I improve my skills by listening carefully to advice and instruction from coaches and managers.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
28	I make fewer mistakes when the pressure is on because I concentrate better.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

Scoring

This is the Athletic Coping Skills Inventory (ACSI), a measure of an athlete's psychological skills, developed by Smith et al. (1994). Determine your score on the following subscales by adding the scores on the question numbers identified. Also, note the following numerical scales associated with your ratings.

- 0 = almost never
- 1 = sometimes
- 2 = often
- 3 = almost always

Finally, note that an * after a question number signifies a reverse-scored item (that is, 0 = almost always, 3 = almost never, and so on).

Coping With Adversity: This subscale assesses if an athlete remains positive and enthusiastic even when things are going badly, remains calm and controlled, and can quickly bounce back from mistakes and setbacks.

(Sum scores on questions 5, 17, 21, and 24, and place the total in the blank provided.)

Coachability: Assesses if an athlete is open to and learns from instruction, and accepts constructive criticism without taking it personally and becoming upset.

(Sum scores on questions 3*, 10*, 15, and 27, and place the total in the blank provided.)

Concentration: This subscale reflects whether an athlete becomes easily distracted, and is able to focus on the task at hand in both practice and game situations, even when adverse or unexpected situations occur.

(Sum scores on questions 4, 11, 16, and 25, and place the total in the blank provided.)

Confidence and Achievement Motivation: Measures if an athlete is confident and positively motivated, consistently gives 100% during practices and games, and works hard to improve his or her skills.

(Sum scores on questions 2, 9, 14, and 26, and place the total in the blank provided.)

Goal Setting and Mental Preparation: Assesses whether an athlete sets and works toward specific performance goals, plans and mentally prepares for games, and clearly has a game plan for performing well.

(Sum scores on questions 1, 8, 13, and 20, and place the total in the blank provided.)

Peaking Under Pressure: Measures if an athlete is challenged rather than threatened by pressure situations and performs well under pressure.

(Sum scores on questions 6, 18, 22, and 28, and place the total in the blank provided.)

Freedom From Worry: Assesses whether an athlete puts pressure on him- or herself by worrying about performing poorly or making mistakes; worries about what others will think if he or she performs poorly. (Sum scores on questions 7*, 12*, 19*, and 23*, and place the total in the blank provided.)

Total score or sum of subscales

Scores range from a low of 0 to a high of 12 on each subscale, with higher scores indicating greater strengths on that subscale. The score for the total scale ranges from a low of 0 to a high of 84, with higher scores signifying greater strength.

Week 3

GOAL SETTING



Why Set Goals?

- **Without goals, athletes will have nothing to strive towards. When the going gets tough, athletes are reminded of their goals to keep pushing forward. Without goals, the athletes will falter when training is difficult.**
- **Achieving goals is part of what makes sport fun. The dopamine hit from achievement, even from simple process goals, will help athletes learn to enjoy life.**

Types of Goals

- **Outcome Goals** aim for endgame achievements, such as a championship. These are largely **out of our control**. While they are effective at rallying a team, the more controllable goal categories will see better results.
- **Performance Goals** aim for a measurable performance target, like a statistical category. These goals are not 100% controllable, but are more so than outcome goals.
- **Process Goals** aim to meet smaller **controllable** tasks that build over time towards larger goals. While small, these are an

important focus during the season.

- **SMART Goals: This stands for Specific, Measurable, Action-Based, Relevant, and Time-Based. Athletes should always frame performance and process goals as SMART goals.**

Goal-Setting Sheet

- **This set of sheets is designed by Stanbrough to bring together long-term outcome goals with short-term process goals. It is recommended that a **season-long** goal sheet be completed in the pre-season, and short-term **weekly** goal sheets be completed regularly.**

Goal #1

Goal #1 Affirmation:

Goal #1 Affirmation:

Process steps to attain this goal:

1. _____



2. _____



3. _____



4. _____

**Goal #2**

Goal #2 Affirmation:

Goal #2 Affirmation:

Process steps to attain this goal:

1. _____



2. _____



3. _____



4. _____

**Summary for the week:****Strengths:**

To work on:

Comments:

Week of _____ to _____

Name _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Partner Name _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Week of _____ to _____
Name _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____
Partner Name _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Week 4

THE ZONE



Mental Zones

- **Figure 4.1 shows various mental performance zones. Athletes can move along this spectrum relatively quickly as circumstances change.**
- **Performance is at its best when athletes are in Flow. Being too anxious or too relaxed will be detrimental.**
- **Athletes may also find Stanbrough's arousal curve useful for visualizing peak performance and reaching Flow.**

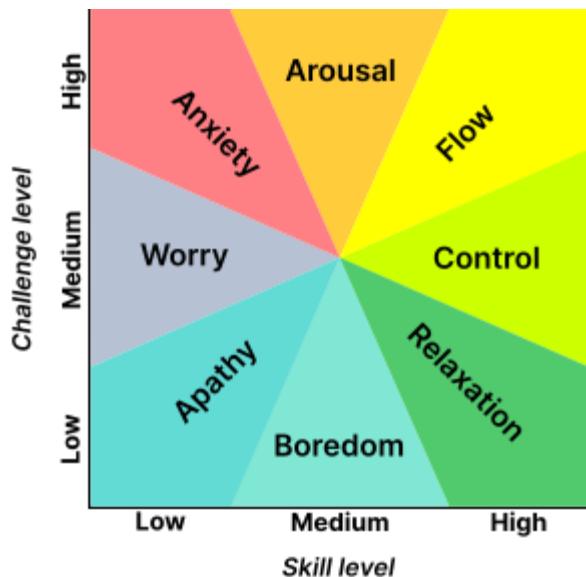


Figure 4.1: Csikszentmihalyi's flow model

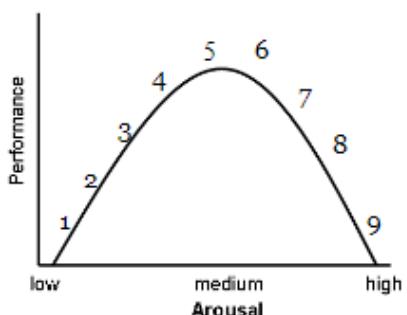


Figure 4.2: Stanbrough's Arousal Curve

Finding the Flow

- **Many distractors can move athletes away from the Flow state, causing a performance decline.**
- **Relaxation techniques for overstimulated athletes & Energization techniques for under-stimulated athletes can be used to return to the Flow.**

Relaxation

- **Total Relaxation techniques take athletes to a completely relaxed state. It involves finding a comfortable position, taking long, slow breaths. For more advanced athletes, imagining themselves in a relaxing place and focusing on muscle relaxation can also be used.**
- **Rapid Relaxation is the next step, and much more useful for competition. It involves deep breathing and repeating a relaxing cue word such as "chill" or "calm" to move out of an anxious or overstimulated state.**

Energization

- **Energization techniques involve 3 main components**
 - **First is quick, shallow breathing to get oxygen to muscles**
 - **Next is a powerful cue word like "pumped" or "extreme"**
 - **Last is an explosive movement, like a jump**
- **When combined, these three things will raise an athlete's arousal**
- **Athletes should identify their zone and use these techniques in practice and competition to find the Flow.**

Week 5

SELF-TALK



Internal Dialogue

- **During practice and competition, the athlete has the ability to consciously convince their body to push on. The subconscious, however, will fight back, trying to return to homeostasis.**
- **Everyone has a voice in their head that can be either positive or negative. If you're telling yourself "I can", your mind can't tell you "I can't". The brain is incapable of thinking both positively and negatively at once. Athletes can train to have a more positive voice, but it takes practice.**

Affirmations

- **Affirmations are an excellent starting point for self-talk training. They are written & spoken phrases that are specific to their internal dialogue and performance.**
- **Affirmations have 5 major guidelines, the 5 P's**
 - **Powerful – Words like "Fantastic" are better than "Good"**
 - **Present-Tense – Use "I am" to make it true *right now***
 - **Positive – Because negative self-talk is counterproductive**
 - **Personal – It should relate to your goals & internal dialogue**

- **Point – Short & to the point**

- **Examples**
 - **I explode from the blocks**
 - **I spring forward like a gazelle**
 - **I am an extreme competitor**

- **Have athletes speak their affirmations out loud, and surprise them with the task of saying one during practice.**

Weeks 6 & 7

IMAGERY & REHEARSAL



Imagining Success

- **Many coaches claim that you must 'see it' and 'believe it' before you can 'achieve it'. This is evident in the success of imagery and mental rehearsal.**
- **Imagery is done in a totally relaxed state, and is a vivid imagination of something. It encompasses all five senses to bring the scene to life as much as possible.**
- **Imagery can be used for creating a relaxing location, remembering a successful race (also called Mental Recall) and, perhaps most importantly, seeing yourself succeed in the future.**

Mental Rehearsal

- **Mental Rehearsal, then, is a specific kind of imagery. It should be used prior to competition to build confidence and practice how to react in a situation. It is most commonly used on the bus on the way to a meet, but can be used at any point in the lead-up to a competition.**
- **Some more advanced mental rehearsal involves imagining a race environment in practice, such as seeing a competitor in front of you during a workout.**

Scripted Mental Rehearsal

- **For beginners, it is easiest for the coach to lead the mental rehearsal by reading a script for the athlete to follow. This is best used in a classroom setting or other learning environment before they progress to self-led visualization.**
- **An example of such a script is below, it should be read after the athletes are in a totally relaxed state.**

Imagine yourself arriving at the track for a meet. Hear the chatter around the stadium, feel the stillness in the air. It is a perfect day for a race. Remember that nobody prepares as well as you do. This is the day you express your superior fitness.

Imagine your warm up routine. See yourself stretching... jogging... and changing shoes. Feel the sweat drop down your neck, letting you know that you've warmed up well. Do you have music playing? If so, what songs? Feel the music amplify the competitive atmosphere. See your competitors warming up around you. Obviously not preparing as well as you.

Now see yourself called to the starting line. Peel off the sweats, and take your place on the starting line. Feel the perfect amount of adrenaline pump through you, just enough to wake your body up for the task ahead. See your competition. See how nervous they look. On the other hand, feel your own confidence as the starter raises his pistol.

Hear the pop of the gun, and feel yourself pushing off the starting line. Smell that single whiff of gunsmoke in the first few steps. As you reach the cut line, see yourself racing smart, cutting in slowly along the backstretch. See yourself moving into position for the curve. Hear the breathing and footsteps of the runners around you. You're feeling good.

Now the final lap is coming up. Hear the bell ring as you pick up the pace. See your competitor right in front of you on the curve. You have them right where you want them. Fatigue is setting in, but you remember your training. You have prepared to fight through it.

When it's time, you make your move. You stay relaxed as you power ahead of your competitors. They are strong. They put in everything they have. But you are stronger. Imagine the pain you encounter during this time. Now imagine the desire you have to succeed, the desire that burns stronger than any pain.

Now you finish the race. Feel the excitement of a hard-fought victory. Feel the combination of tired lungs and tired legs. A small price to pay for the thrill of the competition. You recognize your hard work, and are satisfied with a job well-done.

Now let that atmosphere fade away. Bring yourself back to the here and now. Bring yourself back to relaxed breathing. What you have just experienced is not just part of your imagination, but part of your future.

Week 8

CONFIDENCE

Where to Begin

- **Most athletes join a sport without knowing what they are getting into. Their confidence is either low or hasn't even been determined yet.**
- **Setting athletes up for early success physically can lead to confidence, but bringing them up with mental skills can keep their confidence high.**
- **Try working in responsibilities for athletes. As they become an "expert" on a particular task in their sport, their confidence will rise. As they become more involved in the program, working them into leadership roles and helping teammates will allow both the leader and their teammates become more confident.**

Fulfilment and Momentum

- **Confidence is a game of momentum. Confidence can rise as they find success, leading to more success and more confidence. However, the opposite is also true. They can also lose confidence and spiral towards despair.**
- **Rerouting downward momentum in confidence is important not only for performance, but an athlete's overall well-being.**

- **Encourage them to find fulfilment in completing simple tasks, both at practice (like performing drills) and during the day (like making their bed). Completing tasks successfully, and finding fulfilment in it will help reset their confidence on an upward trend.**

Confidence Tools

- **Confidence can also be trained in a controlled environment using tools. Having these tools on-hand or using them at proper moments will help athletes find their confidence in key moments.**
- **Success List: Have the athlete list a number of things they are good at or have succeeded in. This will allow them to remember their strengths, and find that their self-worth is not tied to sports alone. They will see that they have many other strengths.**
- **Confidence Card: Have athletes design an index card with affirmations and reassurance that they are prepared for whatever comes their way. The fancier the better. When they begin to lose confidence at a competition, they can look at it to regain confidence. It is a great idea to do this alongside rapid relaxation.**
- **Power Picture: Athletes find a picture of them performing well, and surround it with positive association words. An example is listed below.**

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CONFIDENCE

Week 9

FOCUS



Practicing the Skill

- **Focus is likely the skill that requires the most practice of any mental skill. The mind easily wanders, but we can't allow that in critical competition times.**
- **To begin, allow athletes to empty their mind in a totally relaxed state. If a thought comes in, have them imagine pushing it aside. As they progress, add distractions to the mix, or do it in a non-relaxed state.**
- **In practice have athletes pay attention to their surroundings. At the turnaround mark for a training run, have them notice something unique in the area and have them tell it to you upon their return. They will have to find something to focus on, and keep it in mind for the remainder of the run.**

Trigger & Release

- **Athletes can lose their focus during sports due to a mistake. To allow for a return to focus, have them use a trigger and release method.**

- **Trigger the refocus by recognizing you've lost focus. Using a cue word like "focus" can help start the process.**
- **Release the mistake by doing an action to symbolically put the past behind you. An example would be pretending to crumple up a piece of paper and throwing it over your shoulder.**

Week 10

MENTAL PLANS



Preparation Plan

- **These plans are a pre-planned routine that you engage in prior to performing a specific skill. They should be flexible, yet repeatable, and should become automatic over time.**
- **Example:**
 - **First thing in the morning – Make bed, accomplishing the first task of the day to gain momentum.**
 - **During classes / daily activities – Imagery, self-talk, and occasional re-focus tactic. See yourself succeeding in things other than sport.**
 - **Before practice – Mental recall & rehearsal, find proper arousal zone**
 - **During practice – Use self-talk and imagery to enhance physical performance in practice**
 - **After practice – Reflect on performance during practice, use trigger & release tactics if needed**
 - **Evenings – Evaluate daily process goals, progress towards larger goals, & make necessary adjustments**
 - **Before bed – Reflect on daily accomplishments**

Pre-Competition Plan

- **Similar to a preparation plan, these plans are a routine used in the lead-in to a competition. Often designed to coincide with the physical warm-up routine.**
- **Example:**
 - **Prior to warm up – Relaxation, mental rehearsal**
 - **Warm up – Imagery, positive self-talk**
 - **Drills – Energization, Cue words**
 - **Immediately prior – Rapid relaxation, visualize game plan**
 - **During – Cue words, positive self-talk**

Competition Plan

- **Often designed to pick up right where the pre-competition plan left off, these plans outline your use of mental skills during the competition.**
- **Example:**
 - **Start – Relaxation (if needed)**
 - **Self-Talk: Remember your plan, stay within yourself**
 - **Middle – Choosing the right physical tools at the right time, mental recall to training if necessary**
 - **Self-Talk: You have trained for this, your body can do more**
 - **End – Push 'the little voice' aside and focus on the final goal of reaching the finish**
 - **Self-Talk: The end is close, finish on empty, you have the better speed**
 - **Between events – Put previous success or failure behind you, Mental rehearsal, Relaxation**

Recovery Plan

- **Mental Recovery Plans were outlined in the “Trigger and Release” section under Focus. Having a trigger and release plan ready is important for the refocus to be seamless.**

MAINTENANCE



Once athletes have learned each of these mental skills, development and maintenance is the next step. Steps of progression have been mentioned in several sections. As athletes gain proficiency, have them try the more advanced tactics.

Just like not practicing physical skills, failure to practice mental skills, even after mastering them, will cause them to decline. It is important that even highly-skilled athletes continue their training year after year.

IMPLEMENTATION



Mental skills are not to be taken lightly. The skills program should be implemented in a systematic way, not just off the cuff at pre-practice meetings. Having a dedicated learning space, like a classroom, will allow for athletes to get the most out of their mental training.

Sessions should be done at least once per week. Each chapter can be broken into pieces should the coach decide to dedicate multiple days to learning mental skills.

Classroom sessions are not enough, however. Reminders while in action during practice will allow athletes to combine their mental and physical training, so that when the time comes during competition, they are ready.