

Preparing Your Athletes for Competition

The Mind Game: A 4-step Approach



Sports Performance Consultants
Club Development Division

Mental Skills Development

- What would be beneficial for the age-group swimmer particularly 11-14 year old swimmer?
- Factor in:
 - Psycho-social-emotional Development
 - Bloom's Model of Athlete Development
 - Swimming-related challenges



Bloom's Model

Romance	Precision	Integration
<p>Exploration/fun Sport Shopping Aerobic training Non-specialization Coach provided FUN</p>	<p>Technical mastery Are swimmers Parents play support role/ bigger role of coach</p>	<p>Integration of skill and knowledge Individuality Accountability Coach as knowledge base</p>



Mental Skills Development

✓ Goal Setting

✓ Anxiety Management

✓ Concentration

✓ Routines/ Competition preparation



Psychological Skills Development

- **Goal setting:**

- Most athletes are already doing this but not effectively
- Exclusive focus on long-term, outcome goals
- Need to focus on short-term, task goals
- WHAT AM I GOING TO WORK ON TODAY TO MAKE MYSELF A BETTER SWIMMER? (Daily Goals)

WHY is this skill important?

- Develop competence
- Emphasize task orientation – focus on technical mastery
- Enhance motivation
- Enhance enjoyment



Process Goals

Outcome vs. Action Goals

- Focus on the process of performance as opposed to solely on performance outcome.
- Positive goals that relate to athletic performance:
 - Training Goals
 - Technical Goals
 - Psychological Goals
 - Nutritional Goals
 - Lifestyle Goals



Goal Setting Tips

- Be specific!
 - Broad goals do not offer much guidance.
- Goals must be realistic and challenging.
 - Goals that are too easy or too difficult will not provide many benefits.
- Evaluate your goals regularly.
 - Provides feedback and confidence because progress can be noted.
- The goals must be yours.
 - They can't be your coach's or your parent's.
- Be flexible.
 - Things change; good and bad.
- Be public.
 - Share your goals with family, friends and coaches.



Goal



A diagram for goal setting. At the top is a large oval containing the word "Goal" and a sun wearing goggles. Below this are six upward-pointing arrows arranged in two rows of three. The bottom-right arrow contains the text: "e.g. To be on time to praCtiCe eaCh day".

My Dream List:



Four Things I Can do Today to Help Me Reach My DREAMS:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.



Athlete Name _____ Date _____

Hawaii Swimming Goal Setting Form

Challenge:

Goal:

Is your goal S.M.A.R.T.?

- SPECIFIC
- MEASURABLE
- ATTAINABLE/ACTION-ORIENTED
- REASONABLE
- TIMELY

STOP

Benefit of Goal: *What's In It For Me?*

PLAN OF ACTION Action Steps	TIME FRAME		HELP	FOLLOW-UP			
	Beginning Date	Ending Date	Who needs to know or can help?	How do you know when you've completed the action step?	Actual Completion Date	Progress/Results	Reward
1.							
2.							
3.							
4.							
5.							



Psychological Skills Development

- **Anxiety Management/ Relaxation Skills**

- Need skills to manage the body and the mind – “keep butterflies in formation”
- Excessive/ uncontrolled anxiety can negatively impact performance

WHY is this skill important?

- Identity as a swimmer may add to anxiety (I swim / I am a swimmer)
- Success/ Improvement fosters development of competence
- Can become “not fun” real quick



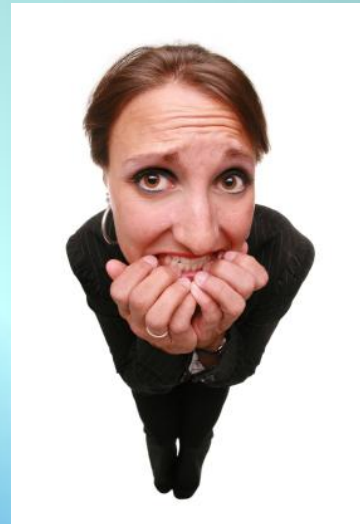
Understanding Nervousness

- **Physical:** This type of nervousness or anxiety relates to symptoms in the body. Some common signs or symptoms include:
 - ✓ Increased heart rate
 - ✓ Rapid breathing
 - ✓ Tight muscles
 - ✓ Jittery
 - ✓ Butterflies in the stomach
 - ✓ Having to go to the bathroom



Understanding Nervousness

- **Mental:** This type of nervousness or anxiety relates to symptoms in the mind. Some common signs and symptoms include:
 - ✓ Worry about ability to swim well
 - ✓ Negative thinking
 - ✓ Racing thoughts
 - ✓ Inability to concentrate
 - ✓ Doubts
 - ✓ What if's



Strategies to Manage Nervousness

- **Physical Nervousness/ Anxiety:**
Belly (Controlled) Breathing

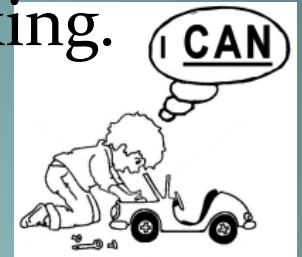


- *Stomach should expand or rise as you inhale (diaphragm breathing).*
- *Slowly exhale--squeeze the muscles in your abdomen to get all the air out.*
- *IN 1-2-3 HOLD 1-2-3 OUT 1-2-3 . . . repeat this several times*
- *Allow tension to leave your body as your exhale.*



Strategies to Manage Nervousness

- **Mental Nervousness/ Anxiety: Positive Thinking.**



- ✓ Ideas for thoughts or self-talk:

- ✓ Reminders about your Race - “aggressive start”, “streamline”, “work from the core”, “maintain tempo”.



- ✓ Confidence Builders - - “you’ve trained hard all year’, “you didn’t miss a practice”, “your test sets are faster than ever”.
- ✓ Emotional Words - - emotionally focused talk: “go for it”, “be strong”, and “this race is yours”.



Goal Affirmations

- **Personal**
- **Positive**
- **Present Tense**
- **Achievement**
- **Action Words**
- **Emotion Words**
- **Accuracy**
- **Realistic**

I am excited to be a AA swimmer with a time of 1:55.43 at the May Invitational.



Goal Affirmations

- **Personal**
- **Positive**
- **Present Tense**
- **Achievement**
- **Action Words**
- **Emotion Words**
- **Accuracy**
- **Realistic**

I hope I don't miss my turn.

I am thrilled to have a turn time under .99 seconds!



Goal Affirmations

- **Personal**
- **Positive**
- **Present Tense**
- **Achievement**
- **Action Words**
- **Emotion Words**
- **Accuracy**
- **Realistic**

**I wish I could make finals.
I enjoy making finals in every event.**



Concentration Skills

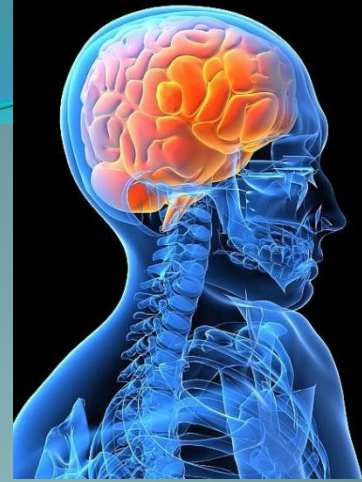
- **Focusing on the Right Thing at the Right Time**

Immediately prior to competing, I'm focused on my breathing. I'm aware of that. I also focus on the lane. When I'm on, it is almost silent except for the referee's whistle. I'm really geared into that sound and smaller details.

1992 Olympic Team Swimmer



Psychological Skills Development



- **Concentration Skills**

- Attend to the task at hand; avoid irrelevant stimuli
- Training as a physical and mental endeavor – that is what is demanded in competition

WHY is this important?

- Enhance skill development / technical mastery
- Enhance competence
- Deal with distractions (social factors as distractions?)



Figuring Out What to Focus on

- **Controlling the Controllables**
- **Follow the K.I.S.S. Principle**
- **Use Cue Words**
- **Practice with Distractions Present**
- **Routines...**

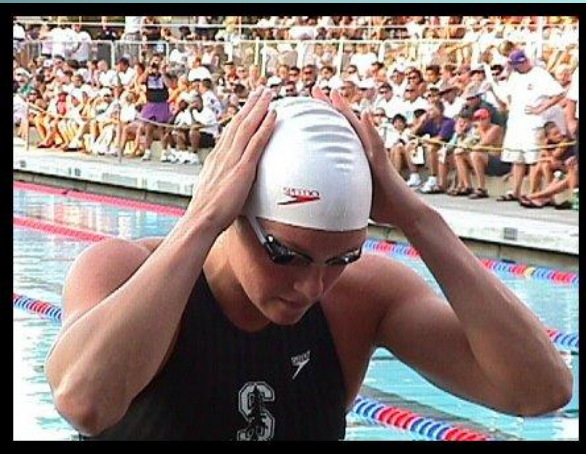


Psychological Skills Development

- **Routine – Practice and Pre-competition**
 - Purposeful implementation of physical and mental strategies to facilitate performance

Why is this important?

- All the “stuff” we have talked about . . . By managing performance, athlete will experience success/ improvement, build competence, enjoy swimming,



Benefits of Developing and Using a Mental Preparation Routine

- ***Attain an Ideal State or “Zone”.*** The Zone relates to Performance.
- ***High self-confidence.*** Imaging a successful upcoming race is the “dress rehearsal” to the real deal - - visualizing a great performance enhances the athletes belief that they can really do it.
- ***Control of Mental Energy.*** critical to manage mental energy so the athlete is not too flat or too manic. Music can help regulate energy.



Benefits of Developing and Using a Mental Preparation Routine

- ***Effective Focus.*** Routine can help the swimmer focus on important aspects of her performance. Technical cues (“explode off the blocks” “hold your streamline”) or images (“torpedo”) can direct attention where it needs to be.
- ***Comfort in Structure.*** A mental routine can be a ‘security blanket’--something to turn to in the stressful moments to bring consistency to their preparation and their performance.
- ***Engage the Mind.*** The mind is a valuable commodity



Putting the pieces together



- **First**, the athlete needs to figure out the desired results.
 - How does she want to think and feel prior to racing?
 - What “mindset” seems to relate to successful swimming for the athlete?
 - Does she want to be very confident, nervous, relaxed, happy, a little worried, controlled, high energy, etc?



Putting the pieces together



- **Second**, Determine how to get to this state.
 - What tools are you going to use to attain the ideal mindset?
 - What is your routine?
 - How do you get to the ideal state?



Putting the pieces together



World Championship Team athlete interview:

Describe how you prepare for races.

Discussed specific things she does, thinks, and says to herself prior to races.

She noted that “I need to be nervous before I race” (**awareness of an Ideal state/ desired end result of preparation**).

Great!

How do you get nervous? “Simple, I stare at my competitors in the ready room” (**this is part of the process she uses to attain her desired state**). She also identified other mental tools she uses to get herself mentally ready to compete.

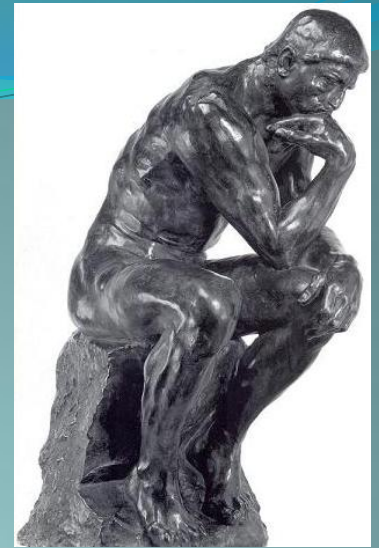


Competition Reflections

- Think of your best performances in the past year and respond to the following:
- 1. How did you feel just before the event?

Mentally/Physically Flat or Highly Activated/Charged
Not Worried/Scared or Extremely Worried

- 2. What were you saying or thinking to yourself before the start of the competition?
- 3. How were you focused during the competition? What were you aware of or paying attention to during the competition?



Competition Reflections








- Now, think of your worst swimming performances in the past year when responding to the following:
- How did you feel just before the event?
Mentally/Physically Flat or Highly Activated
Not Worried/Scared or Extremely Worried
- 5. What were you saying to yourself or thinking before the start of the event?
- 6. How were you focused during the event? What were you aware of or paying attention to during the event?
- 7. What were the major differences in your energy level and your thoughts prior to these two performances? In your focus of attention during the performance?

REFLECTION

- 8. Before I perform, my optimal mind state consists of:
- 9. Strategies to help me achieve my optimal mind state include:



Exercise 4: Create a Competition Race Plan. Take some time to look at your worst and best performance sheets. Use the information on these sheets to create a competition race plan. Examples of elements to possibly include in your mental preparation: mental imagery, cue words, positive self-talk about what you CAN do, Belly breathing or another relaxation strategy, and reminders about YOUR goal. In the boxes relating to your physical readiness you could write down what you like to do in warm-up and how you need to feel physically.

	What do you need to do to be mentally ready?	What do you need to do to be physically ready?
Warm-up		
10 minutes before the race		
One minute before the race		
Specific time during the race #1		
Specific time during the race #2		

THANKS!

QUESTIONS?

