

Sport and Your Mental G.I.F.T.S.

By Laura G. Farres, Ph.D., Ch. P.C.

Every individual can learn to use their mental GIFTS to optimize their focus and ultimately their performance. The more the GIFTS are used, the more they give back and contribute to performance consistency. The aim for athletes is to learn to integrate their mental GIFTS into everyday practice so that their strategies become part of their routine.

Goals

Goals give individuals something to work toward. If they are used properly, they give direction, motivation and focus.

Here are some suggestions for integrating goals into practice:

- Set a goal for every practice. The goal should relate to something you are working toward.
- Before each drill decide what you want to do and exactly how you want to do it.
- After each drill, identify what adjustments you need to make for that skill or play sequence next time.

Imagery

Imagery helps individuals learn new skills, and refine and prepare for pressure situations. Positive images also help develop confidence and belief.

Here are some suggestions for integrating imagery into practice:

- before practice imagine yourself doing the moves you want.
- during practice, before a drill, take a moment to run the skill through in your mind.
- when the coach gives you feedback, imagine or feel what you are being asked to do before attempting it again.

Feelings

Feelings and emotions are a big part of performance. Individuals can learn how to make their feelings work for them as opposed to against them.

Here are some suggestions for integrating feelings into practice:

- Before practice, you can listen to music to get yourself pumped up to practice.
- During practice, you can come up with good personal reminders (images, words or feelings) to guide your performance.
- You can take a deep breath and relax before performing a skill or play sequence.

Thoughts

The things individuals say to themselves can help them focus or can distract them and make them lose focus.

Here are some suggestions for integrating thoughts into practice:

- If you start to talk negatively to yourself and it makes you lose focus, you can say "STOP" to yourself and replace the words with positive statements.

- Find key words or phrases that help you push yourself when fatigued during a tough workout or long practice/competition.

Support

Performance can be supported by planning and preparing properly leading up to and during the performance.

Here are some suggestions for integrating support into practice:

- Follow a routine to get yourself ready for practice and competitions.
- Approach mental focus like you do physical skills and warm it up slowly from simple to more demanding focus challenges.
- Develop a specific routine to follow for particular skills in your sport.
- If you lose focus, have a plan for getting your focus back.

Your mental strategies need to become as familiar to you as your physical skills and therefore need to be integrated in to what you do on a daily basis. Also, there are numerous strategies that you can do outside of practice that can enhance your mental game as well. Contact drlaura@mindinmotion.ca for more information.