

## Confidence

### Hi Wildcats,

In this edition of the “Mental Training” email series, we discuss the importance of self-confidence and its effect on athletic performance. Confidence is a term often used in our community even though it is defined in different ways. I have heard “Confidence means knowing you are going to win.” However, how does anyone know for a fact they are going to win? Aren’t there too many variables beyond our control to guarantee such things? Can someone act confident without winning? I have also heard confidence defined by what it is not. For example, athletes have said, “Confidence is not having any doubt or anxiety.” Though this is true, it is not a complete definition. So, what is confidence? And, how does one become more confident? In a recent study, Olympic medal winners were asked what one component they wished to improve. Their answer: “Confidence.” So, individuals competing on one of the most competitive international stages and were successful (remember they were medal winners) are reporting they want more confidence! If winning an Olympic medal does not induce confidence then it begs the question: what does?

Confidence does not ensure that you will be free of negative thoughts or feelings (surprisingly, for some athletes these feelings are actually beneficial), but it allows you to feel sure of your ability to succeed even when faced with these obstacles. So far, the best definition for confidence I have come across is “Confidence is a feeling state with both cognitive and physiological qualities based on past successful experiences.” Though this is a comprehensive definition, it does not teach you how to become more confident.

If you currently don’t have self-confidence, it is a problem that has a solution. There are tips, which we will discuss, to challenge your doubts and replace them with improved self-confidence. Plus, there even are techniques to reduce your level of anxiety and replace it with self-confidence.



### How can I improve my self-confidence?

#### Change your thinking

- **Be positive**

By being positive you focus on how you have performed well. Whether you win or lose, you are increasing your confidence by examining what was good about your performance. By focusing on the positive aspects of your performance when you lose, you avoid negativity, and are motivated to continue to improve the next time you play. Even if you feel you had nothing positive in your performance, you can think back to some of your greatest performances and remember that you do have the talent you need to be successful. By focusing on the positive you avoid lowering your confidence, and through hard work, can fight to eliminate any problems with your game.

- **Fake It**

Act and appear confident even if you are feeling anxious. You will quickly begin to feel greater confidence. If your opponent is struggling and you appear confident, it is all the more difficult for them to regain the edge because you will appear to be unbeatable. It is especially important to act confidently after you have made

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a mistake. The appearance of losing confidence compounds the error because it allows your opponent to see your vulnerability. By maintaining an appearance of confidence you will be able to minimize the impact of the mistake, and not allow opponents to gain the upper hand.

- **Believe in yourself**

A confident thought such as “When I am playing to my strengths, I’m nearly unbeatable,” can help you achieve your goals and remind you that you are an elite athlete.

### *Change your actions*

- **Be well prepared**

If you have worked extremely hard at training for competition, then when it comes time to actually compete you will feel extremely confident, because you know your abilities are at a high level. You can then remind yourself that you have trained to a level that will allow you to win!

- **Set achievable goals and then reach them**

When you set and meet achievable goals, you demonstrate your talent to yourself and reinforce your confidence. By viewing your success, you raise your confidence level.

### **Too much self-confidence**

Confidence is good, but it can only take you so far. As your confidence level increases, so does your

performance level. You have to be realistic: if you have too much confidence, that is, false confidence, you reach a point of believing you can do things that are actually beyond your limits – at least at this point in your career. The optimal level of confidence leaves you convinced that you can achieve your realistic goals, and drives you to work hard to do so. Overconfidence happens when you have unrealistic views of your ability, and you think you are capable of doing more than you actually can at that point in time. The result of this is failure and diminished confidence.

### **Confidence Induction Technique**

This is a simple way to increase your level of confidence and eradicate anxiety when you are performing in stressful situations. To do this you will use imagery to eradicate feelings of anxiety you may experience during competition.

When performing an imagery exercise, it is important to hone in your senses and incorporate them into your images, such as hearing the reaction of the audience/crowd to your play. It requires imagination and focusing on past experiences. It also is important to perform the imagery in the first person, so that you can see your success through “your own eyes.” You should do this initially in a quiet, private space and then use the imagery when you are feeling anxious while you are practicing or competing.

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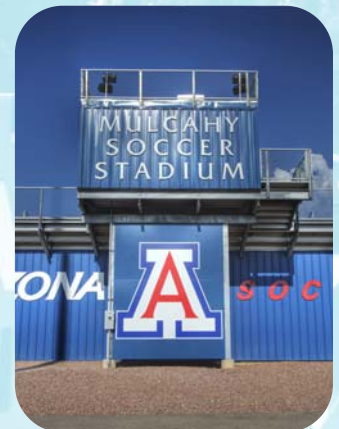


# BEAR DOWN



# WISDOMCATS

- 1 Begin by imagining confidence. Think of a time when you had great success and recreate it in your mind. Remember what it felt like, what you heard, saw, smelled, etc. Concentrate on the scene for a minute because you will be using it to increase your feelings of confidence.
- 2 Now switch to a scene of anxiety, when you panicked or were worried about failure. As you remember this, let the scene develop in the same way you developed your confidence scene. You want to allow yourself to relive your moment of anxiety.
- 3 Next, let the scene of anxiety go away entirely and return to the scene of confidence. Remember it as you did initially, then once you have recalled it, let the feeling of confidence sink in for 15 seconds.
- 4 Now return again to the scene of anxiety; pay attention to how it develops and how you experience this anxiety.
- 5 Without leaving the anxiety scene, use your confidence imagery to eliminate your feelings of anxiety. Let the feeling of confidence seep in and eradicate any feelings of anxiety. Once it is fully developed, hold this feeling for 30 seconds.
- 6 At this point, you have learned how to replace your feelings of anxiety with feelings of confidence. It is suggested you practice this technique many times initially and then continue practicing your imagery in low pressure situations. This way you will be confident in your ability to eradicate anxiety in real life situations. You can now use your positive imagery to remove feelings of anxiety. If there is a particular stimulus that makes you anxious (such as shooting free throws), remember to use positive imagery of past success to eliminate these feelings as you approach the line.



If you would like some assistance in feeling more confident; if you would like to discuss other techniques for anxiety; if you would like to meet and discuss other benefits of sport and clinical psychology; or if you are feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, stressed out, frustrated, worried, sad, or lacking confidence, I would highly recommend scheduling an appointment with me to help you reach your potential. Please contact the medical assistant at 621-8805 or ask your athletic trainer to schedule an appointment. I look forward to working with you.

**Best Wishes,**  
**Scott Goldman, Ph.D.**  
*Director of Clinical and Sport Psychology*