



Focus and Concentration

Hi Wildcats,

In this edition of the “Mental Training” email series, we will discuss the ability to focus and concentrate. Athletes are often told by their coaches “C’mon, Focus!” However, it is rarely described what focus means or how to do it. In any performance, there is a ton of information to consider. Some of these cues may be external such as the position of the outfield while others may be internal such as how fast your heart is beating. Another differentiation to consider is if the cues are broad such as scanning a football field or narrow such as preparing for a putt. Additionally, some of these cues may be relevant such as how much time is left in the game while other cues are irrelevant such as fans booing. Thus, the best definition of “focus” is being aware of everything that is going on while concentrating only on the key elements that will lead to a successful performance.



To best assess your ability to focus, ask yourself the following questions:

- How well can I be completely “in the moment” while competing, yet be relaxed during breaks in the performance?
- How well do I put aside distracting thoughts at practice or competition?
- Are there times when I am so absorbed in what I am doing that I don’t notice what’s going on around me?

The ability to focus is a skill that can be trained like any other skill in sport. The following are some recommendations for improving your focus:

Choose to Focus On What is Relevant

- For example, class is the time to focus on school and practice is the time to focus on sport. If you are thinking about your midterm at practice, it is time misspent. Similarly, if you are thinking about your sport while in class, it too is lost time.
- Identify potential distracters and how you plan to cope with them. Similarly, it may be helpful to practice with distractions present.

Practice Eye Control

- Focus on simple cues of your sport such as the ball, the floor, a piece of equipment, etc. Try to ignore distractions such as crowd noise.
- One technique to improve eye control is the “Spotlight” technique. The object is to create a beam of light from you to your desired goal. For example, a golfer may visualize a lighted trail from their ball to the hole.

Employ Non-Judgmental Thinking

- Don’t evaluate the play as good or bad. Instead, focus on what needs to get done to execute a better performance

(continued on next page)



Establish Routines

- This tells your mind and body “it is time to start.” For example, before shooting a free throw, bounce the ball, take a deep breath, find your spot, then release.

Develop Cue Words

- Cue words are specific phrases that remind you of key elements that help successful performances such as “stay low” or “explode from the blocks.” They can also be used to center your attention to the present task. For example, “next

point” and “let it go” can be helpful in refocusing after an unsuccessful attempt.

Practice

- The frontal lobe part of your brain is known for impacting quickness of response and improving your focus. Therefore, engaging in tasks that exercise this part of your brain would improve your focus. Research has shown the following tasks to improve your frontal lobe activity: reading aloud and fast, “Where’s Waldo?” books, Sudoku, crossword puzzles, anagrams, and some video games such as “Brain Age” and “Mind Medley.”



If you would like some assistance in focusing; If you would like to feel 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, please contact Angie at 621-8805 or ask your athletic trainer to schedule an appointment. I look forward to working with you.

To schedule an appointment, call **621-8805, 621-3334**, or ask your athletic trainer for assistance.

Best Wishes,
Scott Goldman, Ph.D.
*Sport and Clinical Psychologist
for Student-Athletes*