



Performance Routines

Hi Wildcats,

In this installment of the “Mental Training” email series, we will discuss the use of performance routines for improving athletic ability. Often, athletes will enter my office saying, “my mind is all over the place,” or “I am thinking way too much.” It may seem ironic that a sport psychologist would write about the ills of thinking, considering a large focus of sport psychology involves working with athletes’ thoughts. But, that is just the problem. Sometimes, thinking is a bad thing.

Reality:

There is a difference between perception and reality. The media and fans love to talk about the perception of the moment by saying things like “it is all on the line with this shot.” Remember, the reality is that the skill performed is the same no matter what the situation is. As an example, from a technical standpoint a baseball player’s swing is the same during his first at bat as it is during his last at bat. The media makes a living hyping the final at bat because that sells papers. Don’t believe the hype! When athletes begin to buy into “the moment,” they will often place too much

pressure on themselves which leads to unproductive self talk. Unproductive self talk includes: talking too much to yourself; being overly critical or negative in content; and thinking about irrelevant information. Note

that these types of self-talk have no benefit for your performance.

Self-Talk:

The body functions best when it is performing without thought. More accurately, the body performs an action better without conscious thought or self talk. You may have heard of this as “Automaticity” or performing with a “Quiet Mind.” The science behind this concept is that self-talk comes from one part of your brain and physical performance comes from a very different area.

Thus, if you are engaged in self-talk when you should be performing, you are thinking with the wrong part of your brain. Athletes succeed when prior to performing a skill, they use purposeful and specific self-talk; and, when the skill begins, they shift to automatic action. They allow their body to do what it has practiced millions of times. Athletes tend to perform poorly when they shift back to self-talk and attempt to perform the task in a step-by-step manner.

“So, I mentally tried to put myself in a familiar place. I thought about all those times I shot free throws in practice and went through the same motion, the same technique that I have used thousands of times.”

– Michael Jordan

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BEAR DOWN

Automatic Action:

Often, you hear the expression “practice makes perfect.” This is not true. Practice makes automatic. For example, think back to when you learned to drive. At first, you spent a great deal of mental energy thinking about specific aspects of driving: how much pressure to place on the gas pedal, where to keep your hands on the wheel, and so forth. Now after a few years of practicing, notice how little mental energy you spend on these details. Rather, you just drive automatically while often using your mental energy on other things like talking to your friends in the car, talking on your cell phone, listening to the radio, thinking about what to do tonight, etc. If you think about it, you have only been driving for a few years and the skill has become automatic. Now think about how much time and effort you have placed in learning your sport. It is more likely you have spent more time on your sport than just about anything else in your life. Therefore, your mind and body can perform your sport automatically. Your job is to not get in their way.

“If you prepare properly, you may be outscored but you will never lose. You always win when you make the full effort to do the best of which you’re capable.”
– John Wooden

Performance Routine:

Thus, the goal of a performance routine is to:

- Define what to think
- Define when to think
- Allow your body to perform automatically

An Example of a Performance Routine

Step 1	TACTICAL: Decide what skill to execute (What golf club to use)
Step 2	READYING: Develop a mechanical, mental, emotional ritual (2 dribbles before a free throw)
Step 3	IMAGING: Visualize performance expectations and feeling the movement
Step 4	FOCUSING ATTENTION: Focus on only one relevant cue (The lower left corner of the goal)
Step 5	EXECUTING: Perform with a “quiet mind” without thinking
Step 6	EVALUATING: Provide constructive self feedback and then moving on to the next play

If you would like to develop a specific performance routine; 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, angry, 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.

Best Wishes,

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