

CONCENTRATION, THE KEY TO ATHLETIC EXCELLENCE

By Dr Alan Goldberg—
Competitive Advantage

Concentration is the key to athletic excellence. All too often an athlete or team's faulty focus gets them into hot water performance-wise.

One important aspect of concentration is being able to stay focused on what YOU are doing. When athletes stop focusing on themselves and instead begin to think too much about the competition, then choking and performance problems are the end result.

“Concentrate on YOU for peak performance”

If concentration is the key to athletic excellence, then mistakes in concentration are the primary reason that athletes struggle performance-wise. Choking, slumps, performance problems, fears and lack of self-confidence can all be traced to the athlete's mental mistakes in focusing. If you want to develop mental toughness and start performing more to your potential, then you have to begin to learn how to better control your focus of concentration. In particular, you had better learn how to keep your concentration squarely focused on you and what you're doing. Let me explain.

Just about every athlete has had the heart-warming experience of getting psyched out or intimidated. You know the story. You are feeling good about yourself and your game until you catch a glimpse of the opponent(s). Maybe they are bigger, faster, stronger, better, smarter, etc. than you. Perhaps they have a more snazzy, expensive warm-up than you. Maybe it's the matching backpack so professionally strung across their shoulder or that they have the very latest in equipment. Perhaps, you notice that they are using that new, high-powered, under-arm deodorant. Whatever it is about them that you think gives them the competitive edge over you, the sight of this opponent begins to strike terror into your little heart. You start to break out into a cold sweat. Your confidence drains suddenly to empty. Your knees turn into Jell-O and your arms and legs feel like lead. And the weirdest thing of all...You just can't seem to stop focusing on them! You are like a deer in headlights. Are you ever in trouble!

Isn't it interesting that after spending all this energy on your opponent, your performance tends to go down the old tubes. That's because 95 out of 100 athletes get knocked off center by focusing too much on their opponents. It is the MAJOR cause of psych-outs and intimidation. If you're in that rare 5% and you always do better by concentrating on the opposition, then keep doing it. For the rest of you, listen up! Why, on earth would anyone in their right mind concentrate on something that makes them nervous, kills their confidence and destroys their game? Exactly...for NO good reason!



One key job an athlete has is to "stay inside himself" when he performs. That means the athlete needs to go out there and do what he does best. He needs to stick to basics and "play his own game", "run her own race", "Skate her own program", etc. However, when you get too caught up in how skilled and wonderful you imagine your opponent to be, there is a tendency to begin to step outside yourself and try too hard. The internal thinking goes like this:

"She's so good that I have to do something extraordinary just to be able to stay in the game with her." The minute you start "bearing down" and trying too hard you are sunk! As an athlete your major concentration job is to stay focused on what YOU are doing. You need to block out your opponent and everything about them unless there are some strategic things that are USEFUL to consider and that will ultimately HELP your performance. In English this means that you should not get caught up comparing yourself with the opponent, unless you'd like to feel lousy about yourself. Comparing is a wonderful technique that far too many athletes use to kill their confidence.

Remember, the competition is inside of you. Your toughest opponent isn't out there! He/she is inside. Go look in the mirror and you'll see who the real opponent is. When you focus on how strong or talented the opposing team is, they don't end up beating you! You end up beating yourself!

So practice focusing on YOU. When your concentration starts to wander to your opponent's fancy \$2000.00 a pair "Lair Mike's" (we are not doing any advertising for a certain shoe company you may have heard of), quickly and gently bring your focus back to you and what you are doing at that moment. EVERYTIME you find your focus leaving what's important and heading over to your opponent or even a teammate who you're competitive with, IMMEDIATELY BRING YOURSELF BACK!

Be patient here. If you drift a lot, no problem! BRING YOURSELF BACK A LOT! A break in concentration won't psych you out or ruin your game. What will wreck your confidence and tighten you up is a break in concentration that you don't catch! Begin today to strengthen your ability to stay focused on yourself. Practice the "ball stare" exercise. Sit in front of a ball, puck, trophy, etc. Pick a spot on it and calmly focus on that spot. When your mind drifts, and it sure will, quickly bring yourself back to the spot. Try doing this for 3-4 minutes a day and you'll further develop your ability to "stay inside yourself."



**Concentration comes out of a
combination of confidence
and hunger.**

Arnold Palmer