



PSYCHOLOGICAL PREPARATION

A Mental Skills
Guide for Athletes



INTRODUCTION

As you grow and reach an elite level, mindset, mental skills, and preparation can set you apart for the other top competitors.

The mental side of sports plays an important role in enhancing or obstructing success. There are often distractions and unique circumstances surrounding multi-sport games or unfamiliar out-of-town championships.

Mental preparation should start well ahead of these competitions. Spending a bit of extra time in the weeks leading up to the event can have a significant impact on your overall performance and place on the podium.

This guide is broken down into three key stages leading up to a major competition: 12 months out, three months out, and one week out through competition time.



12 MONTHS OUT

SHORT-TERM & LONG-TERM GOALS

You should set short and long-term goals. Your main long-term goal should be your final destination and something to consistently strive toward. Your short-term goals, on the other hand, help you stay in the moment and focused on the process or task at hand.

IMAGERY AND THOUGHT MANAGEMENT

Start incorporating positive imagery into your pre-game and competition routines. Try to visualize yourself having success internally and externally. How might that feel, look, and sound? These images can bring a sense of calmness and confidence when the going gets tough.

DEFINE ROLES AND MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

Especially in team sports, or when athletes from different organizations and clubs come together quickly, each athlete needs to understand and buy into their role. Athletes should know what is expected of them and realize the team's success is the combination of each individual's success, no matter how big or small their role.

EMOTIONAL CONTROL

Finding an optimal level of excitement is crucial to successful athletic performance. Routines, warm-ups, breathing and re-focusing techniques are just a few strategies that can help manage your emotions. Emotional control can be learned through practical exercises, which can easily be incorporated into practice and daily routines. The emotional exercises that work best for you can then be refined and adjusted when you're participating in other tournaments leading up to the "big event".



3 MONTHS OUT

ANTICIPATE & PLAN FOR DISTRACTIONS

There's significant power in anticipating an issue before it happens. If something unfortunate occurs and has already been identified as a possibility, then there's less impact and a pre-discussed plan can be executed. Established plans can help you deal with potential distractions that could derail your performance. Here's how you can do it:

- **Brainstorm possible distractions or challenges that could knock you off your game**

For example, not playing as much as you expect, an unexpected loss, an official making a poor call, a delayed game, poor playing conditions, extreme weather, or an equipment malfunction.

- **Brainstorm ways to react and prepare**

For example, clarify team roles, outline your goals, determine a game plan and strategy, pack extra food and water, extend warm-ups.

- **Imagine the challenge occurring and visualize overcoming it**

You, your team, and your coaches can examine the probability of the event occurring and the possible impact it might have on performance. Challenges with a high probability and high impact should be further explored.

Coaches can often facilitate refocusing strategies and develop team resilience by structuring challenges within the team schedule, practice environment, or by simulating competition conditions.

LESS IS MORE

In the final stages of preparing for competition, it's important to have a "less is more" attitude. Many athletes and coaches want to try to over-prepare for the event by squeezing in extra competitions and practices as the "big event" approaches. You need to be well-rested and mentally relaxed to perform your best. Substantial changes or adjustments to training, technique, or personal routines should be limited. Small refinements may be necessary, but the key is to find what works for you and stick to it.

FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH THE SURROUNDINGS

Know where to find the cafeteria or nearest food outlet. Identify the team’s meeting place, a quiet place, and a potential walking route. If you need to travel or walk to the competition, explore the distance from your accommodations to the venue. When you’re familiar with your accommodations and transportation, it can reduce stress and prevent you from feeling lost or frustrated.

If there is an opportunity, it can be beneficial to access the competition venue when no one else around. It’s a chance for you to get familiar and think about your pre-competition plans. It would also help you identify any necessary adjustments to routines and warm-ups to avoid any stressful last-minute changes.

CREATE A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Bring things from home, place posters or team slogans in sleeping areas or dressing rooms. It could help you and your team feel comfortable, familiar, and in control.

PREPARE A DAILY SCHEDULE & ITINERARY

Know specific times for team meetings, meals, free time, and time for family and friends. It’ll help you adjust your preparation plans within the team’s schedule. It’s easy to get caught up in all the

QUESTIONS?

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distractions at multi-sport games but knowing when things are going to occur helps you stay in the moment rather than wondering when a particular event is happening. Big competitions and multi-sport games are busy. The more time you have to prepare and relax, the better.

MAINTAIN YOUR ROUTINES & PLANS

A remarkable amount of time and effort will have gone into individual and team preparation. Be respectful of this preparation and stick to the routines and plans. All too often, athletes will move away from the plans they and their coaches have worked so hard to establish. Ultimately, it only harms their performance and the team’s dynamic.

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

Things never go exactly as planned. Something unexpected will inevitably happen. At these times, use your preplanned refocusing strategies. Communication between you and your coaches will be important and new plans may need to be drawn up to maintain and regain focus.

CREATE RECOVERY OPPORTUNITIES

Allocate time for physical and mental recovery during competitions. Create strategies to relax and shift your focus away from the competition. Reading books or listening to music are easy strategies to re-energize the mind and body.



1 WEEK OUT & DURING GAMES



SUMMARY

You and your teammates should set clear goals, adhere to personal preparation strategies, stay in the moment, and minimize the impact of potential distractions. Even in the face of adversity, it is important to remain positive and optimistic. Managing emotions can make a big difference when it comes time to prepare for a competition. **Most importantly . . . have fun!**