



## COACHING CORNER

### MENTAL SKILLS TRAINING

Coaches often refer to 'mental strength' and 'mental toughness' when attempting to describe the elusive quality which distinguishes great players from the good ones in any sport. This quality is underpinned by specific mental skills and as a coach; you have an important role in helping players or teams to develop these skills.

There are three elements to a complete player PMP:

- **Physical skills.** This is the element we are most impressed with and seem to measure each other by. If a player possesses this in abundance then we put them in the "good player" basket
- **Mental skills** This element allows a player to maintain focus and concentration. You will often hear coaches talk about a player being mentally tough or strong, it is this elusive quality which sets the great players from the good ones
- **Physical fitness** Endurance, strength, flexibility and nutrition are sub elements of this important areas of a players preparation. It is the least considered by most but can offer the greatest payback for the least amount of work

If your preparation has considered all of the elements above then you have given your self the best chance of success. This article will focus on mental skills training.

#### Mental Skills Training

The development of psychological abilities is probably more important than physical abilities. Even the greatest skilled players choke! As with physical skills – good technique and application, mental skills need to be taught correctly, fine-tuned and then practised until they are mastered.

#### Goal Setting

Goal setting is primarily a mental skill and has been shown to influence the performance motivation of players as well as being linked to positive changes to psychological states such as anxiety.

**For more information on goal setting, refer to Goal setting module in the Regional Coaches Toolkit – section 4 getting started.**

## **Imagery**

Coaches should encourage players to set aside time to mentally rehearse a skill and visualize performing that skill successfully e.g. Visualise the arc of the boule in the air, the focus on the landing spot. Visualisation can be done at any time of day and should become a routine to ensure it is mastered.

## **Relaxation**

Coaches need to help players cope with anxiety, as they will face situations many times during competition when they are anxious. This is normal however many react in a negative way, which affects their performance. Those who are able to perform with consistency, despite their feelings of anxiety, have simply learnt to cope with the anxiety. Consistent mental preparation is the key to peak performance.

Coaches should encourage players to set aside time to perform techniques for relaxation. The more this is practiced off the terrain the easier it is to perform during stressful periods before or during a game. There are many techniques from rhythmic breathing, visualisation through to listening to relaxing music.

**For more information on anxiety and choking refer to Essential Equipment 3 Anxiety in the Regional Coaches Toolkit – section 7 sports science**

## **Self Talk**

Coaches should identify ways and techniques to train players to use positive language, which focuses their attention on performance. Players should be encouraged to say, I am playing well, this is what I do in training, I can do this, I have done this many times before. This will build confidence

## **Mental plan**

Coaches should ask players to work out what routine helps them “psych up” before and during competition and encourage them to practice this and make it their “habit”.