

Session 2
March 19, 2008

PERFORMANCE REFLECTIONS

*Develop Awareness Today from
Lessons Learned Yesterday for
Enhanced Performance Tomorrow*



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Awareness, Lessons Learned, Enhanced Performance

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Peak vs Poor Performance

Most sports are played in the mind first and then in the performance arena. Champions win first mentally before they do physically. This is because thoughts, feelings, and self talk (what you say to yourself before, during, and after your performance) have a direct impact on how well you perform. Worries about losing, nervousness, and anger at yourself or your opponent can change your breathing, level of muscle tension, and blood pressure. Even slight physical changes interfere with your performance rhythm and your movements. In addition, negative thinking can disrupt your concentration and undermine your self-confidence, both important for optimal performance.

The first step in becoming a mentally tough athlete is to believe that what goes on “upstairs” is very important to how well you perform “downstairs.” To help you take that first step, complete the following three-part exercise.



Part 1—Peak Performance

Find yourself a quiet place, free from distractions. Close your eyes. Think about the last time you had an extraordinary performance, when you performed to the very best of your ability. In as much detail as possible, using all your senses, see, hear, and feel everything **now** that was happening then.

1. Before your performance started, examine closely how you felt, especially your thoughts and self-talk.
 - a. What were you feeling?

 - b. What did you say to yourself about the event? About the competitors?

- c. What thoughts made you nervous?
 - i. Remember, situations, people, and events don't make you nervous. Instead, your perceptions and thoughts about them make you nervous.
 - d. Were you excited and looking forward to the competition?
2. Now let the action begin in your mind's eye and closely examine your thoughts, self-talk, and feelings during the performance and at various breaks in the performance.
 - a. What did you say to yourself when you made a mistake or things didn't go your way?
 - b. What were your thoughts about fatigue or any uncomfortable feelings that you experienced?
 3. When the event was over...
 - a. What did you say to yourself?
 - b. How did you make yourself feel?

Part 2—Poor Performance

For the second part of this exercise, think about the last time you gave a really poor performance, when everything seemed to go wrong and nothing you tried worked. See, hear, and feel now everything that happened then, beginning as above with your pre-performance thoughts and feelings.

- i. Examine closely how you felt, especially your thoughts and self-talk, before the performance started,
 - a. What was the quality of your self-talk?

- b. What thoughts did you have about your ability? About your opponents? Pay close attention to your inner dialogue before the event.

- 2. Once again, let the action begin and notice how you responded to mistakes, bad breaks, and your opponent's behaviour.
 - a. What was your attitude like?

 - b. What did you say to yourself at important stages in the performance?

 - c. How did you respond to feelings of discomfort?

- 3. When the event was over...
 - a. How did you make yourself feel?

 - b. How did you evaluate yourself?

Part 3—Comparison

For the final part of this exercise compare and contrast your thoughts, self-talk, and feelings during these two performances. Write down the comparisons so you can study them.

- 1. Think about your peak and poor performances again and write down the differences in your self-talk before each performance.
 - a. Compare the kinds of things you said to prepare yourself.

P E A K	P O O R

a. Compare your feelings about the place, time, opponents, team, etc.

PEAK	POOR

b. Write down other things that were on your mind at the time and how they affected you.

PEAK	POOR

2. Write down differences in your thoughts and feelings during the performances.

a. How did you react at critical points (mistakes or bad breaks) during the performance?

PEAK	POOR

b. What happened mentally as the performance progressed?

PEAK	POOR

It should become quite clear to you from the exercise that *the major difference between good and bad performance lays within your head*. There is a qualitative and quantitative difference between your thoughts when you do your best and when you do quite poorly.

Good performances are preceded by positive, optimistic, challenging self-talk (or by very little at all), by feelings of excitement and enthusiasm, and by some butterflies (flying in formation). Mistakes and bad breaks are forgotten immediately in these good performances, and the athlete is totally absorbed in the performance.

Bad performances, on the other hand, are preceded by negative, self-defeating, and pessimistic self-talk. During the action, the negative self-talk frequently continues unabated and increases when things go wrong. Mistakes are blown out of proportion and carried into the next stage of the performance by the negative internal chatter. Further, the quantity of negative self-talk interferes with concentration.

This exercise should have convinced you that *there is nothing random about good and bad performances*. Each is directly related to your self-talk and emotions before, during and after the event. If you can believe this, then you're ready to take the next step in becoming a mentally tough athlete:

- ★ Learning to develop an awareness of your mental and emotional performance-related habits. That is...
 - ❖ What do you usually think about before, during, and after your performance?
 - ❖ How do you feel emotionally during these times?
 - ❖ How do you feel physically?
 - ❖ What do you tell yourself about your opponent and the atmosphere of the competition? And,
 - ❖ What happens to your performance as your thoughts and feelings develop?

Before you can make effective changes in your performance, you have to become **aware** of the connection between your specific thoughts and feelings of your resultant performance. This awareness then tells you what specific mental skills you might need to master and to improve your performance. For example, if you get angry and call yourself a 'jerk' when you make a mistake and this outburst and self-evaluation disrupts the next stage of your performance, then you know that you need to work on handling mistakes better. Or, if you find yourself getting angry with people moving around and talking while you're performing, then concentration skills are where you need to focus.

Gaining awareness is the most important first step in changing negative and self-defeating thought patterns and behaviours. You need to understand the disruptive dialogue and tricks of your 'inner coach,' both during practice and in competitions. Many athletes are reluctant to focus on the negative, explaining that the negative is what they're trying to eliminate. True, but to do so they need to understand when and how they focus on the negative self-talk in the first place. In order to

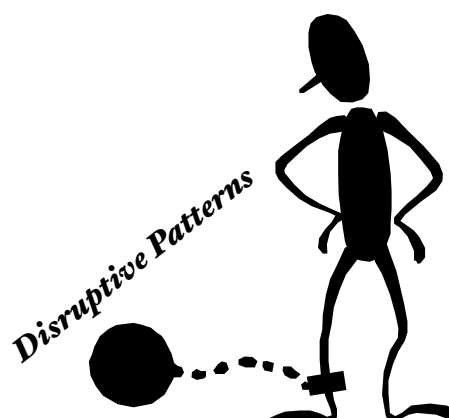
eliminate this disruptive inner chatter, you must first bring it into awareness. The following exercise will help you do just that.

Disruptive Situations and Events

For you to be completely IN CONTROL of your performance you first need to know the competitive situations and/or events that cause your performance to spiral downwards out of control. Take the time now to ***carefully identify the specific situations that have caused you to perform poorly.*** .

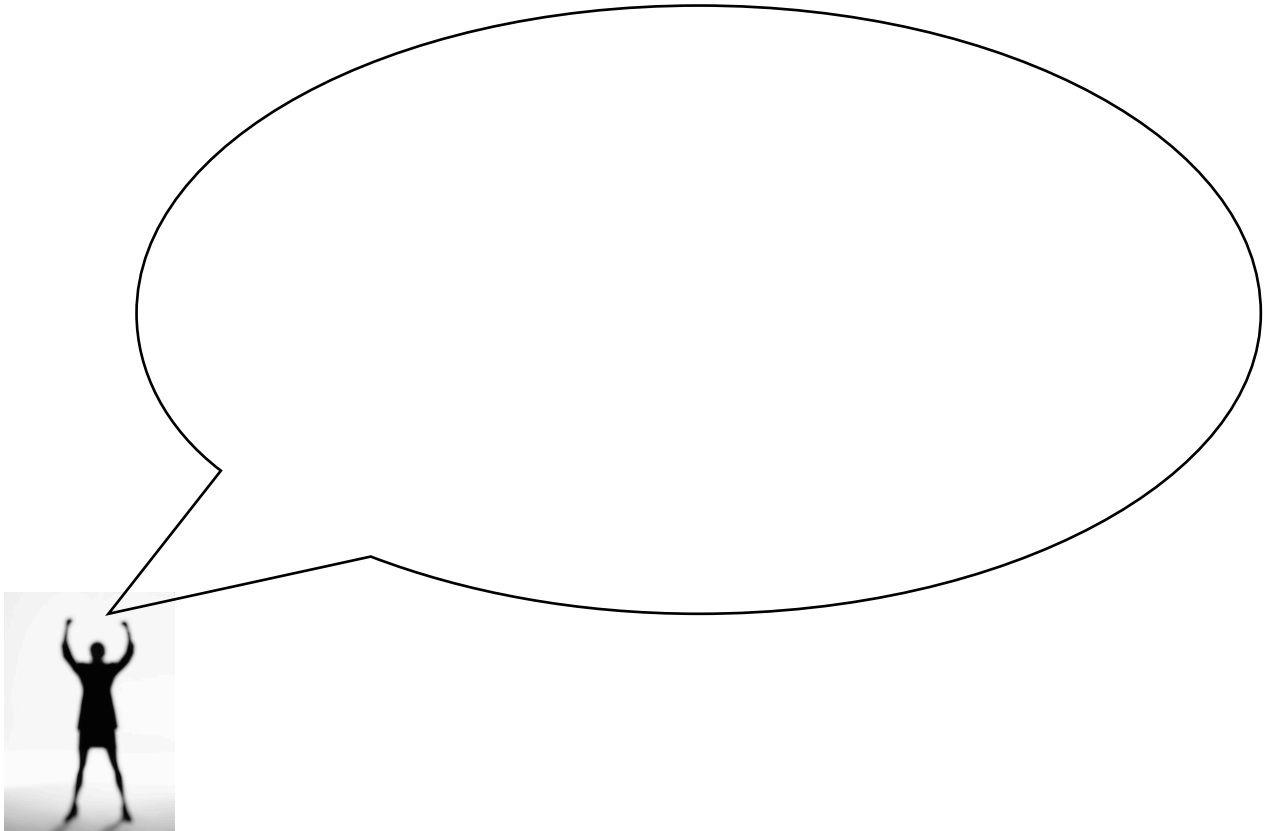
Disruptive Pattern

What are the disruptive thoughts, self-talk, feelings and behaviours that have a negative effect on your performance in those situations you identified above?



Peak Performance Pattern

What patterns of thoughts, self-talk, feelings and behaviours do you plan to develop to enable you to have peak performances on a consistent basis? Describe this 'Champion' as clearly and precisely as you can. Imagine yourself in the 'heat of battle' performing as a focused, composed and confident champion. **Write down what you see, hear and feel happening in your mind.**



Daily Journal

Begin to keep a daily journal, marking down all your thoughts, feelings, and attitude before, during and after training and do the same after you compete. (After practice or competition is the time to mentally review what's gone on 'upstairs' and how you've reacted. Remember, you want (need) to become more aware, not more distracted!) Capture the exact phrases and mental pictures that come to you and the actions or things that stimulate them. If someone else's voice seems to be speaking to you at critical points, who is it (parent, coach, teammate, friend, opponent)?

The awareness you gain through keeping a journal will help you understand how powerful the mental side of your performance is and will motivate you to make changes. Remember, if you are making a mechanical or technical error in any aspect of your performance, you cannot correct it and improve your performance without first becoming aware of the mistake (not just intellectually, but kinaesthetically). The same holds true of your mental game. Becoming aware of the ways you undercut yourself will enable you to make positive changes.