

# PRE-COMPETITION PREPARATION

## SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

### Part Seven in a Series

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When physical abilities are very similar, then the psychological factors become more crucial in determining the outcome of a competition. Within each athlete there is an "ultimate athlete" that needs to be discovered and allowed to grow. The goal of each athlete should be to reach peak performances, where the mind and body are into it together.

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***The best physical training and technical skills are of little value if psychological factors prevent the athlete from performing optimally.***

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These psychological factors are so powerful that they can easily negate thousands of hours of physical training. So the big question is "how do you train these psychological skills"? This is the essence of pre-competition preparation. The following list of psychological training techniques are all valuable to various athletes for different reasons. Nevertheless, these methods are very useful in preparing athletes for the stresses of performance. The success and applicability of these interventions depends upon not only the sport, but also the individual athlete.

#### INTERVENTIONS:

- A. PROGRESSIVE RELAXATION
- B. AUTOGENIC TRAINING
- C. CONCENTRATION TRAINING
- D. IMAGERY
- E. MEDITATION
- F. GOAL SETTING

Progressive relaxation training consists of alternately tensing then relaxing muscle groups in a sequential fashion; while at the same time concentrating on the feelings and sensations associated with muscular tension, relaxation, and the contrast between the two. Progressive relaxation teaches the athlete not only how to relax, but to also diagnose small amounts of tension which effects performance.

Autogenic training is a series of short positive statements which the athlete repeats to himself in order to train the body to instantly react to a message from the mind. This technique is intended to relax the body but keep the mind active and aware. Autogenic training allows the athlete to be in control, yet react instantaneously to his environment.

Concentration training is a multifaceted program which develops all the concentration skills. Athletic activities in-

volve a variety of different concentration abilities and also the capacity to change concentration modes quickly. Most athletes and coaches think that concentration means to narrow your focus; but this is only one concentration skill.

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***The great athletes can change concentration abilities quickly and accurately.***

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Imagery as a performance intervention is relatively new but also quite successful. All players have the innate ability to image. The only problem is to channel this skill appropriately. Athletes need to learn to image positively and not permit negative thoughts to dominate cognitive functioning. Imagery practice is a perfect supplement to actual physical practice.

Meditation is the oldest form of systematic relaxation. It alters human consciousness through a disciplined focus of attention. For years it was believed that only hippies or flakes used meditation. Now, of course, we know that meditation can be beneficial for good athletes in their attempt to control their performances. Meditation is based on the five following characteristics: 1) a quiet environment, 2) a specific posture, 3) a meditation object, 4) a passive attitude, and 5) a regular practice schedule (about 20 minutes daily).

One of the most important psychological skills an athlete can develop is the ability to set effective performance goals. Positive goals improve performance. Goals that are too easy or too difficult result in boredom or worry. Athletes need to be challenged by realistic goals which can be accomplished. Small goals which are rewarded when reached will keep the athlete highly motivated.

In summary, pre-competition preparation from the psychological standpoint is just as crucial as adequate physical training. Before performance the athlete undergoes a number of emotions and psychological states. These states must be addressed and controlled or performances will suffer. This is what pre-competition preparation means.

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***Remember – Psychological skills must be practiced the same as any other skill.***

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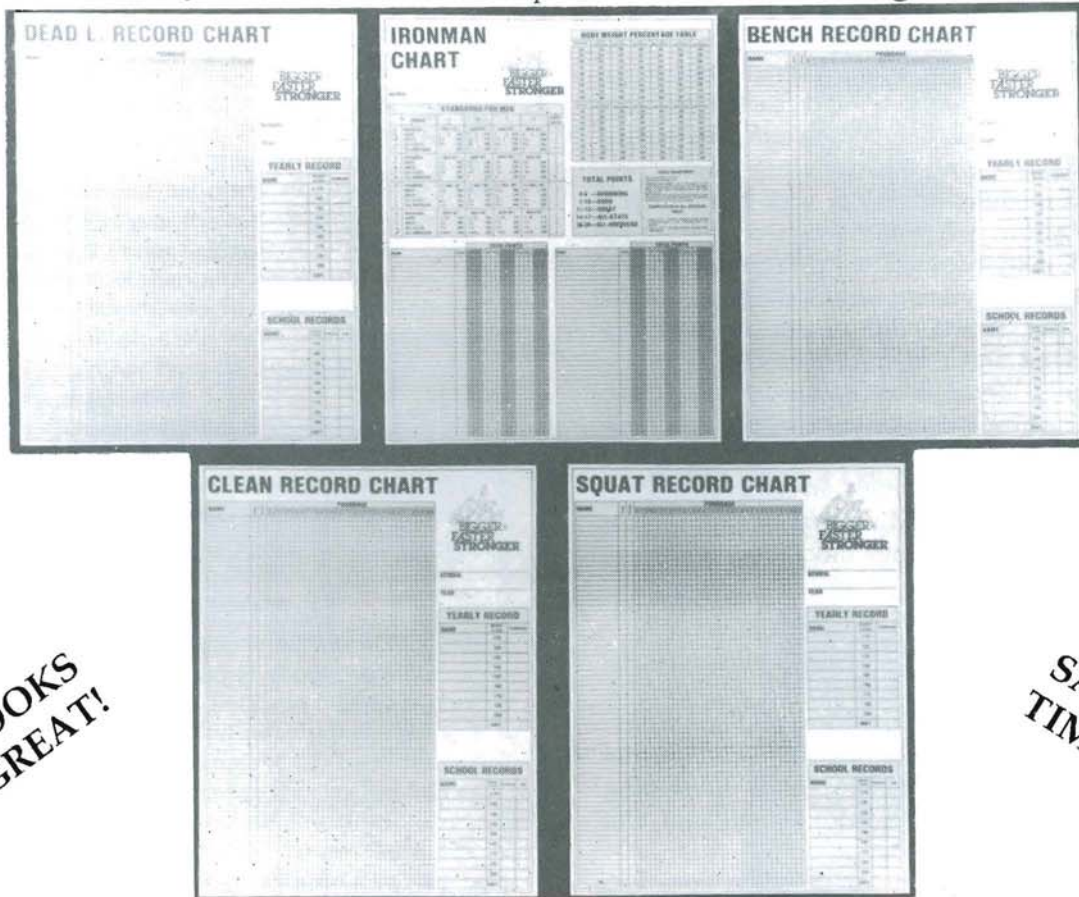
The previously described mental training techniques have a variety of uses and their effectiveness will be determined by the individual athlete and the requirements of the sport. The important point is to locate the exact pre-competition method which will best facilitate each athlete's performance. The fact remains that the body does not work in the absence of the brain. It would be foolish to continue to train athletes without utilizing the aforementioned techniques as part of their pre-competition preparation. To include mental training as a supplement to physical training is to aid the athlete in becoming the best he can possibly be.





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