

ATHLETIC POISE

By Roger Freeborn

Editor's Note: Roger Freeborn, a highly successful football coach at North Valley High School in Oregon, believes as I do: Sports Psychology is worth investigating. It is worth implementing into your total program. Coach Freeborn states, "I've heard coaches for many years say 'think about the game' before the contest or while traveling on the bus to the game." What does that mean? What are athletes supposed to think about exactly? Charles Garfield has a great book called "Peak Performance" which helps answer these questions.

Coach Freeborn has borrowed much of Garfield's material and shared it with his players. This same material is presented in this article "Athletic Poise."

Athletic poise is the ability to recognize and maintain a particular state of psychological readiness, a mental preparedness that athletes and sports psychologists acknowledge as being a prerequisite to peak performance. This performance state can be systematically taught. You can develop athletic poise by becoming aware of the ideal performance state; getting in touch with your own experiences in this state; and rehearsing psychological readiness as part of preparing for competition.

SECRETS OF THE POISED ATHLETE

Payton Jordon, American Olympic track-and-field coach, has called discus thrower Al Oerter one of the 'most mentally poised' athletes he has ever met. Oerter had the ability to maintain himself a state of "optimal psychological readiness" under the most intense pressures of competition.

Charles Garfield states that, "even watching Oerter work out, I was always aware of his sense of reserve and self-mastery. He knew himself well, both mentally and physically, and he had an acceptance of his own personal idiosyncrasies. He was patient about his own limitations, though he was always pushing beyond them. He had great ability to calmly self-criticize and self-correct. Oerter seemed to recognize fully his emotions as a source of power and inspiration that contributed to his abilities, and he knew how to direct his emotions for maximum benefit.

Maintaining the ideal performance state was not – at least for Oerter – a complicated process. He described his own athletic poise as "the ability to step outside yourself" and to calmly ask how you can correct or improve your performance. He did not struggle with his own ego to do this; such a struggle can lead to "choking" or to caving in under pressure. Oerter reflected that there was clearly a state of mind that made it possible for him to perform at the highest levels of which he was capable, but he expressed this in a very casual way: "As long as I can concentrate and remain somewhat calm, I can normally do very well."

In hundreds of interviews with peak performance athletes, very few were conscious of the "optimal performance state" and that they were only "vaguely aware of an ideal internal climate for performing." Nevertheless, it is known that performance is directly affected by one's ability to create and maintain this state voluntarily. Once learned it is an easy state to achieve and maintain.

The opinion of most researchers is that top-level athletes generally control this optimal performance state subconsciously and automatically. The gifted athletes seem to be able to perfect these techniques quickly on their own, while most other athletes need specific training techniques to accelerate their acquisition of these skills. The following seem to be true:

1. An ideal internal psychological climate exists for every athlete.
2. When an athlete feels right, performance is right.
3. The level of performance is a direct reflection of the way one feels inside.
4. Performing toward the upper range of one's potential is a natural consequence of the right kind of internal feelings occurring at the right time.
5. The elements of the ideal performance state are fundamentally the same for all athletes and all sports.
6. The ideal performance state is most accurately described in terms of specific states of feeling experienced by individual performers.
7. Competitive toughness is essentially the ability to create and sustain the ideal performance state regardless of the circumstances of play.

The ideal internal climate for performing is characterized by high-level energy intensity accompanied by a profound sense of inner calmness. The high energy and the inner calmness, rather than being two simple components, are together actually a complex of mental and physical conditions that Garfield calls **peak performance feelings**.

PEAK PERFORMANCE FEELINGS

There are eight mental and physical conditions that athletes describe as being characteristic of the feelings they have at those moments when they are doing something extraordinarily well. These characteristics have been discussed throughout Garfield's book and are summarized as follows; the athletes have feelings of being:

1. **Mentally relaxed.** Of all the feeling states examined, a sense of inner calm is by far the most frequently mentioned. Along with this inner calm, athletes often report feeling a sense of time being slowed down and having a high degree of concentration. By contrast, a loss of concentration, a sense of everything happening too fast, and a sense of things being out of control are associated with mental tension.
2. **Physically relaxed.** Feeling that the muscles are loose, with movements fluid, precise, and sure, is closely linked with peak performance.

3. **Confident and optimistic, with a generally positive outlook.** A feeling of self-confidence, a positive attitude, or an inner sense of optimism about being able to perform well is reported as a key factor that determines whether the athlete can transform a potentially threatening athletic challenge into a success while maintaining poise.

4. **Focused on the present.** Athletes report having a sense of mind-body integration or of harmony between mental and physical functions, and of not having any thoughts or feelings about the past or future. When completely focused on the present, logical and analytical processes are suspended, and as this occurs the athlete has the sense that all actions are occurring automatically and effortlessly.

5. **Highly energized.** Words such as **joy, ecstasy, intensity** and **power** are frequently used to describe this highly energized state. Although fear, anxiety, and even rage have been traditionally associated with high performance levels, these feelings were rarely mentioned as contributing in any way to this high energy state.

6. **Extraordinary awareness.** Athletes almost universally describe a state of mind in which they are acutely aware of their bodies and of the athletes around them and have an uncanny ability to anticipate correctly other athletes' moves and respond effectively to them. This awareness is closely related to the state of being focused on the present.

7. **In control.** Although athletes report a feeling of being in control, the control described is largely subconscious. There appears to be no deliberate effort at the moment of peak performance to **exert** control over the situations around them or over other people, but there is a definite sense of being able to make all the right moves, with the results being exactly what they intended.

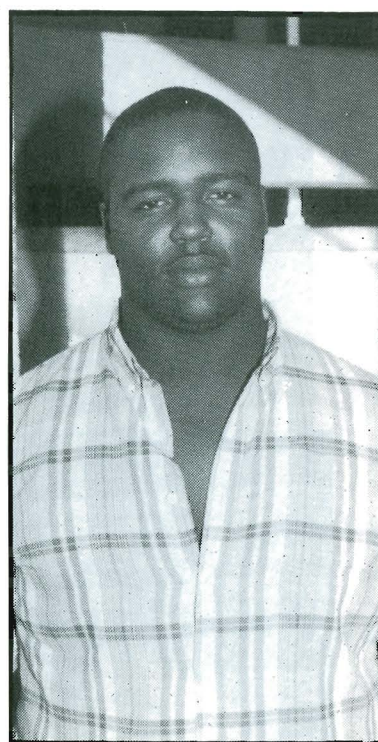
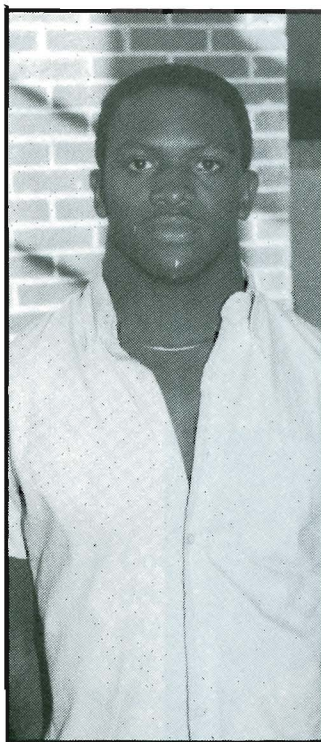
8. **In the "cocoon."** The word **cocoon** has been used for many years to describe the sense of being insulated from the anxiety or fear ordinarily associated with particularly challenging athletic situations, which would normally arouse fight-or-flight responses. Being in this cocoon, the athlete was able to avoid the loss of concentration, the accelerated, tight-muscled, out-of-control feelings commonly associated with the fight-or-flight response.

Editor's Note: I apologize. I really blew it as Larry Ware and Carey Jackson were not included in our March's Issue as BFS High School All-Americans. I was so impressed by Coach Perry's letter that I filed it in my "future story" folder then forgot to put them on a team. I think you'll agree they deserve recognition. Here's his letter:

LARRY WARE

CAREY JACKSON

BFS HIGH SCHOOL ALL-AMERICANS



5-11 180 lbs.

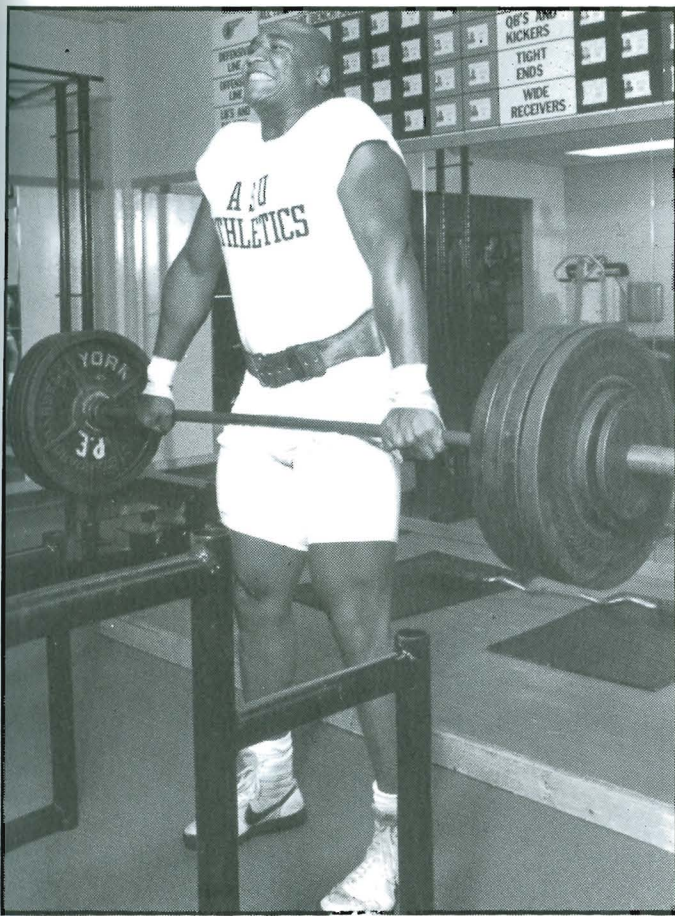
6-2 295

ROBERT E. LEE HIGH SCHOOL
6-A Alabama State Champs

Dear Bigger, Faster, Stronger:

I hereby enthusiastically nominate Larry Ware and Carey Jackson. I fully realize that the odds for placing a player on your All-American Team are minute and the odds for two is astronomical against me. But I would like to explain my nominations. First, I have never nominated anyone before for this team because I truly believe that those nominated should deserve to be nominated because of accomplishments or attributes that they possess. I am a five year member of the NSCA, and been involved with competitive powerlifting for eleven years. Never in my career have I come across two such athletes as Carey Jackson and Larry Ware. These two are the reason our football team was 15-0, 6-A State Champs, and ranked #2 in the USA in 1986. Let me elaborate on each player briefly.

Carey Jackson is 6'2" and weighs 295 lbs. Carey has the most dominant force I have ever had the privilege to coach. His massive body along with his incredible strength made him feared by most of our opponents. I have nominated Carey basically because of the tremendous amount of strength he possesses as well as his football accomplishments. I believe there must be a standard to judge performances. Therefore, all of our lifts are performed with strict style. Being a competitive powerlifter, I demand the strict style. A 390 bench competition (with pause) is outstanding. A 600 squat (breaking parallel) with no supersuit is equally outstanding. A 550 deadlift



Hardman Power Shrugging 435!

JAMES HARDMAN PROGRESS CHART

HIGH SCHOOL

	FR.	SO.	JR.	SR.
HT	5-11	6-1	6-2	6-3
WT	160	205	230	250
40	X	X	5.3	5.2
Bench	220	275	300	325

COLLEGE

	FR.	SO.	JR.	SR.
HT.	6-3	6-3	6-3	6-3
WT.	245	255	255	270
40	5.0	4.95	4.9	4.9
Bench	350	380	385	390
Squat	480	545	600	600
*Power	X	350	405	405
Shrug				
VJ	X	X	24	24

*Times 8 Reps!

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BFS HIGH SCHOOL ALL-AMERICANS

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is what he maxed without even practicing. Carey is being recruited by many colleges.

Larry Ware is 5'11" and weighs 180 lbs. We have had many backs to leave Lee and play major college football. Our school has won eight state championship games in the largest classification since the opening of the school in 1955. Larry is the best of the best. Here are some of his accomplishments.

1986 Bally's All-American

1986 Mr. Football in the state of Alabama-ASWP

1986 Top football player in Alabama-ASWP

1986 Althons Southeastern Football-Best back in Alabama and best in the south team

1986 Orlando's Dixie Dozen

1986 Montgomery Quarterback Club-Player of the Year

1986 6A Metro Player of the year

1986 All State Team-ASWP

1986 Two time All-City player-Montgomery, Alabama
Alabama High School Athletic Association State

Touchdown record holder for a single season

Gained over 2,000 yards in a single season.

I've nominated Larry on his athletic accomplishments first and his physical attributes, second. 505 squat is not bad for a 180 lb. high school senior. He also has a 335 bench press and a 500 deadlift which he only did for this nomination.

Larry has been discovered by many colleges and universities for a football scholarship. Here are a few: Auburn, Florida, Georgia, Texas A & M, and Pittsburg.

I want to close by saying that I believe in your journal and what you're doing for high school athletics. My nominations are as sincere as I could possibly make them. Our school probably will never have two athletes like Larry and Carey again. Please give these two seniors consideration for your All-American Team.

Jim Perry

Assistant Football Coach

Robert E. Lee High School

LAMAR BASEBALL

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overachievers who spent many hours in the weight room and on the practice field. Their 86 record was 18-4, and they ended the season losing the state championship game by a 6-4 score.

Winning state titles is both important and fun, but when teams overachieve due to their own hard work, the rewards of excelling beyond one's personal expectations, can be the biggest prize of all. The Lamar program is one dedicated to excellence, and we are strong supporters of the BFS system. Our players like the clinics, tapes, equipment, and work outs offered by Bigger, Faster, Stronger. Everything the system stands for will work if the players are motivated to desire the maximum from the end result.