



An Attitude of Gratitude – A Great Mental Skill?

“If you see no reason for giving thanks, the fault lies within yourself.”
Tecumseh

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Although it may seem peculiar that a sport psychologist would be writing about gratitude, it is not a mistake. Gratitude is a sign of maturity and helps athletes mentally perform better. Developing an attitude of gratitude is a mental skill I teach athletes in order to improve mental performance. You might be wondering what gratitude has to do with increasing focus or performing under pressure, but it has a large connection to performance on the field at every level of play.

Separates Who You Are from What You Do

One of the most common mental challenges that athletes face is pressure to perform. This pressure can either improve performance or hinder it. Many times, however, pressure inhibits performance. Part of the reason for the pressure is that athletes base their self-worth on their athletic performance. When athletes are grateful and train their minds to concentrate on all of the good in their life, however, they begin to see a difference between *who they are and what they do*. Athletics is something we do, not who we are. When we see athletics as who we are, there is tremendous negative mental and emotional pressure. This type of pressure ultimately hurts performance. Building an attitude of gratitude, however, helps athletes see that they are much more than their win-loss records, and this reduces pressure and enhances performance.

Perspective Decreases Pressure

Gratitude allows us to see how fortunate we are in life. The act of making a gratitude list on paper or in our minds helps us to see the good in our lives, even though it may not be as much as another teammate or competitor. The fact that we can even play sports is something for which to be grateful. There are individuals who have lost the ability or never had the ability to compete because of physical limitations. There are also individuals who have lacked family or financial resources. Again, an attitude of gratitude provides perspective and makes us realize that each and every practice and game is a gift.

Gratitude Brings Clarity

Gratitude also increases focus. When we have our athletics in perspective, it helps us to concentrate more clearly in training and competition. We do not get overwhelmed with thoughts of performance destroying our self-worth and gratitude has a way of taking the edge off and quieting our minds. I am not suggesting to not take sports seriously or to not strive to be the best and win, but am suggesting to keep it in perspective. When we keep perspective, we are more relaxed, and when we are more relaxed, our level focus is raised. And we all know that when our focus is higher, our performance is greater.

The concept of gratitude as a mental skill may seem a bit odd and unusual, but I have found that it is a common theme in my work with successful athletes over the past 15 years. Athletes who are more grateful tend to perform better with all other things being equal. It is not the one and only thing required for great performance, but it is a key that can aid in consistent performance. Compete as hard as you possibly can and be grateful as hard as you possibly can as well!