



## Are You a Driver or Passenger?

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A key determinant to the effectiveness of mental training is being a driver or passenger. Many athletes and coaches reduce the impact of their mental preparation because of being passengers. Being a passenger is easier, but certainly less effective. Take the analogy of being a driver or passenger in a car. For example, think about when you were young and your parents drove you to games and practices day after day, month after month, year after year. You were the passenger. When you finally got your driver's license, however, and were the *driver*, you did not know how to get to practice. Why? Because you were a *passenger* for many years and did not learn the actual directions. Being a passenger is passive, being a driver is active. Which are you when it comes to mental preparation – a driver or passenger?

If you want to maximize mental preparation, and therefore performance, you must be a driver. Being a driver means *actively* working your mental muscle. A passenger uses a yellow highlighter when reading while a driver takes notes in the margin. It is easy to sit back and just highlight, but your mind is doing the same thing. When the game is on the line, do you want to know where you are going (driver) or run the chance of getting lost (passenger)?

The answer is clear, but you have to be honest about how *actively* you are mentally preparing – Are you mentally preparing at all? Are you simply reading a quote and nothing more? Are you keeping a journal? Are you maintaining statistics, both mental and performance, in your journal? Are you completing a journal *before and after* practice? Are you performing mental training drills on a consistent basis? Your answers to these questions will indicate whether you are a driver or passenger, and therefore, what level of athletic success you can expect.

Listed below are just a few simple ways to make your mental preparation more active. These tasks will make you a driver, not a passenger.

### 1. Keep a Journal

Maintain a journal in which you evaluate, write, discuss and plan your performance for practice and competition. I have developed a specific journal for athletes, but a simple notebook is one way to get started.

**2. Evaluate Mental Progress**

Make certain to evaluate mental concepts, such as focus, performing under pressure, bouncing back from mistakes, motivation and effort. Most athletes evaluate skill performance, but not mental. It is the mental qualities, however, that dictate success in competition.

**3. Seek Education**

Read books on mental training (taking notes, not highlighting of course), consult with a sport psychologist, ask your coach to bring in a mental coach to work with your team, go to seminars, listen to podcasts, or seek out free newsletters such as this one.

**4. Plan Purpose for Practice**

Make certain to have 1-2 specific objectives for each practice. Again, write these in your journal and evaluate after practice. This creates a higher quality practice, and therefore, higher level performance.