



Mental Jumping Jacks Right Before Game Time

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Athletes are familiar with warming up before a game or competition. They run, stretch and perform drills to get their physical bodies ready. Most mistakes athletes make, however, are mental, not physical, and are a direct result of *mental tightness* before game time. Athletes spend important time physically warming up before games, but fail to prepare their minds, thus resulting in mental mistakes in competition, especially in the beginning. Athletes and coaches must learn and perform “mental calisthenics” before games to make certain their mental motors are as primed as their bodies.

Get Off to a Great Start

Every athlete and coach knows that getting off to a quick start in competition means rapid confidence and an edge over opponents. It does not always guarantee success, but it dramatically improves the percentages. If you look at sport statistics, there is a higher percentage of winning among athletes and teams taking a quick lead. Do not ever underestimate the importance of getting off to a great start – it sets the tone for the rest of the game, week, season and year. Thus, athletes and coaches must stretch their mental muscles during warm up to increase chances of quick and confidence starts.

Mentally Stretch Right Before Bedtime and the Morning of Competition

Although mental training must be performed all during the week, the night before and morning of competition is a critical time for mental preparation. Athletes must spend time visualizing during these times and set their minds in the right place to compete. They can see themselves executing skills, implementing the game plan, or remaining relaxed when under pressure. For example, a tennis player will see great serves right from the beginning; a quarterback will imagine perfect passes in the first series; or a basketball player being an aggressive defender. Again, athletes’ skills are set the day before competition, and the only remaining factor is mental. Make sure it is ready.

Perform Mental Jumping Jacks During Physical Warm Up

When athletes are going through physical warm-up before games, they need to be mentally preparing as well. The mental warm-up needs to be just as efficient and routine as the physical one. Many athletes fail to warm up their minds, however, and forget that the majority of their mistakes are mental ones. Athletes ***must be thinking*** about their role, visualizing success, and simplifying the thought process for competition. They need to

write their cue word and begin to hone their mental state. For example, baseball players must think about their first at bat, basketball players their first five minutes of defense, golfers must play the first three holes on the range, and tennis players serve out the first game during warm up. These mental calisthenics make certain that athletes' minds are as ready as their bodies.