



The Psychology of How Underdogs Approach a Big Game

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It was clearly apparent in all media outlets throughout the world that the New York Giants were underdogs in the Super Bowl. So why even play the game if New England was such a lock on winning? I am sure the New York Giants felt differently about their possibilities to be victorious, even though they realized themselves to be underdogs. So what exactly did the Giants *mentally* need to do as they faced the undefeated team in the northeast? Let's explore this David and Goliath phenomenon where most people like to see the underdog come out on top.

1. Embrace the Underdog Status

From a psychological perspective, it is many times better to enter big games being the underdog. This took pressure off the Giants and allowed them to perform in their best possible manner. Pressure and stress on the Patriots may have created muscle tension and a decrease in focus, resulting in poorer performance. The New York Giants should have been grateful to be the underdog.

2. Expectations Created Pressure . . . on the Patriots

The expectation to win was clearly on the Patriots. This means pressure. There was much less pressure on the Giants – if they lost, all expectations were met, and life goes on. If New York wins, most football fans takes pleasure in the fact that the underdog overcame the odds. The Patriots, on the other hand, now get blasted about losing the most important game of the season. Their undefeated season has faded in the blink of an eye. Again, it is better to be the underdog.

3. Creates a Chip on Your Shoulder

There is nothing more dangerous than talented athletes with a chip on their shoulder. The Giants have proven a lot in few weeks before the Super Bowl, but were still only receiving limited respect simply because of the power of the Patriots' season. All praise to the Patriots – they deserved it. The Giants, however, used this lack of respect as a motivation to prove everyone wrong. This “chip” is a great motivator and initiator of mental sharpness.

4. Focus on Gameplan

The Super Bowl is a time of many distractions. The New York Giants needed to insulate themselves from as many of the distractions as possible. They allowed

the media and fans to believe what they wanted, and just kept doing their work. They realized that the winner would be the one who executed best on that day, regardless of what has been believed or said up to that point in time. Freedom from distraction always increases the chances for optimal execution. With both teams so closely matched in skills, it came down to execution. Who executed better? The team with better focus.

5. Do Not Get Mad, Get Even

All underdogs need to spend time on skillfully and mentally preparing for execution, not on expressing anger at a lack of respect. It is wasted energy and the Giants had no control over other people's perceptions or thoughts. Respect is earned by actions, not words. Giants used their actions and status as underdogs to quiet the majority crowd. Getting angry causes a lack of focus, getting even raises it!