



## Teach Athletes Single-Mindedness and Get Better Results

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One of the current areas that coaches are addressing with their athletes is sport psychology. Seasoned coaches realize that knowledge of the X's and O's will only take their team so far and that improving the mental performance of athletes is a critical factor. Coaches realize that athletes must perform in practice, but they also have to parallel this performance into competition. This feat occurs in the mind.

Coaches actually can enhance their athletes' mental performance within the time-frame permitted by practice and training. Skill and physical conditioning are obviously critical for success and require emphasis each and every day, but mental conditioning can be enhanced during the regular practice schedule as well. These mental lessons do not take as much time as one might think and are a necessity if one wants to see his or her athletes achieve their highest potential.

One mental area that coaches need to teach athletes is *single-mindedness* - the ability to place complete concentration on the task at hand. Many times athletes perform sub-par because of worrying about too many details and simply forgetting to "play" or "compete." They get bogged down mentally by worrying about the outcome or about making mistakes, playing from a standpoint of fear, or being overly concerned about how others are viewing their performance. Athletes must process a great deal of information very quickly in order to be optimally successful, but when it is time to compete, it is time for single-mindedness. Help your athletes develop this skill by emphasizing it in practice. Single-mindedness allows athletes to let their bodies do what they have trained them to do without thinking too much or worrying. There are numerous ways to enhance the single-mindedness of athletes listed below. Utilize any or all of these strategies and you will be helping your athletes mentally condition their minds to play with a single-mindedness.

- While your athletes are warming up, challenge them to answer one of the following question: "What is your purpose today?" or "How will you get better today?" or "How will you help the team today?"
- Place one of these above-mentioned questions on the locker room or in individual lockers.
- At the end of practice, ask your athletes whether they accomplished their goal for that day. If so, congratulate them; if not, challenge them to stay after and accomplish it or reset it for the next practice.
- Explain in very simple terms your single-minded purpose for practice; you can role model this behavior for your athletes.

- Two-minute drill – before a game or practice, obtain silence for two minutes – have the athletes specify their single-minded focus for the practice or game.

Remember that athletes do not achieve skill and physical excellence by doing something once, but rather through repetition for years and years. The same is true for mental conditioning. Keep teaching single-mindedness each and every day and it will translate into better performance!

Coach Hard, Coach Fun, Coach Well!