
MENTAL SKILLS CURRICULUM

FOR ATHLETES AND PERFORMERS



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Chapter 1: Athletic Identity and the Foundations of Mental Skills Training

*“If your whole life was about building up to one race, one performance,
or one event, how does that sustain everything that comes afterward?
...Eventually, for me at least, there was one question that hit me like a ton of bricks:
Who was I outside of the swimming pool?”*

– Michael Phelps, *The Weight of Gold* (2020)

Defining Athletic Identity

As an elite athlete, your whole life is dedicated to the pursuit of your ultimate goal. At least it feels like that. Athletic identity (AI) is how much a person associates with the role of an athlete and is influenced by the social environment (Brewer et al., 1993). Athletic identity describes what the athlete is doing. It is the foundation of their self-concept in the sport context. Identity theory states that an athlete with a salient AI will behave as they think an athlete would behave because identity is associated with role meanings (Sabiston et al., 2019 and Whaley & Biber, 2020). AI does not remain stable throughout a lifetime or career, it increases between the ages of ten to fifteen years old and develops from the interaction between the context and person as well as the social environment (Schmid et al. 2024). A salient AI can lead to athletic self-schemata, which is a set of characteristics that the athlete believes is an integral part of that identity (Sabiston et al., 2019). Therefore, establishing a client's level of AI can lead to a discussion of their motivation because a client with a weak AI still participating in sport may have extrinsic motivation.

In Practice

Athletic Identity can be measured by using the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (Brewer et al., 2001; *see Workbook*). This scoring sheet assesses not only the AI strength but also the core factors of social identity, exclusivity and negative affectivity (Brewer et al., 2001), which can indicate motivation orientation. Consultants can use this assignment to determine a new client's level of AI, if it is not obvious in initial interviews. These results will also be important for athletes in transition. As will be discussed later, an exclusive AI is usually unhealthy because it severely limits the opportunities to feel competent. Athletes can use the Identity Map (*see Workbook*) to explore their available identities. Consultants can work collaboratively with client

on identifying alternative identities and not foreclosing important ones in favor of focusing on sport or performance. These alternative identities will hopefully serve as a protective factor if the athletes suffer a traumatic injury or transition out of sport.

AI and Motivation Orientation

A strong AI is associated with higher levels of motivation in the sport context (Brewer et al., 1993). If an athlete presents in an initial consultation with a low AI, participating in sport may not be part of their intrinsic values. According to self-determination theory any type of controlled motivation, where the athlete is seeking external rewards or avoiding punishment, is detrimental to the integration of intrinsic regulation to athlete's schemata. Whereas measures taken to enhance autonomous motivation, where the athlete has choice and knows the reasoning behind required behaviors, can lead to intrinsic regulation (Bandhu et al., 2024). This relates to AI in the sense that a salient athletic identity may have a reciprocal effect on the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness because the fulfillment of those needs will enhance and AI while a salient AI promotes the perception that those needs are met.

The pursuit of excellence versus the pursuit of outcomes relates to mastery versus performance goal orientation. Mastery orientations pursue task-related competence, whereas performance orientations focus on outcomes and comparisons (Bandhu et al., 2024). Findings on the relationship between goal-orientation and AI have been varied, where some have found AI enhances mastery orientation (Lochbaum et al., 2022) and others have found that a performance orientation contributes to AI (Daniels et al., 2005). However, longitudinal benefits have been found for mastery orientations as a protective measure in athletic transition. In their study on how AI changes after athletic retirement, Schmid and colleagues (2024) found that athletes who were satisfied with their careers regardless of whether they were objectively successful kept

higher levels of AI after retirement. Athletes who are mastery-oriented are at a lower risk of identity crises in the time period after athletic transition.

“Sport Ethic” and the Unhealthy AI

Conformity to “sport ethic” can enhance AI, but overconformity poses risks for deviant and self-destructive behavior (Hughes and Coakley, 1991). “Sport ethic” differs from AI where “sport ethic” refers to the norms and values of the sport itself, rather than the individual athlete and encourages athletes to sacrifice for the sport context, outperform competitors and seek challenges. To maintain control of their pursuit of excellence, elite performers have to sacrifice a lot of control. For example, choosing to train the number of hours required to achieve excellence in your performance means sacrificing the control over your schedule. Choosing to live a healthy lifestyle may mean sacrificing some social connections or situations. Focusing on taking small steps in improvement means sacrificing control over the performance outcomes. However, if the athlete unquestionably accepts the specific sport value system, such as aggressiveness in contact sports, it may lead to those behaviors which are not socially acceptable outside of the sport context (Hughes and Coakley, 1991).

An unhealthy athletic identity is when the exclusivity causes identity foreclosure of other possible identities, such as student. This will then limit their opportunities for perceiving success in other areas of life. If schemata are how an athlete thinks an “athlete” should act, think, or feel based on their experiences, memories, and perceptions (Sabiston & Gilchrist, 2019), then whether those beliefs are distorted or dysfunctional would dictate the potential destructiveness of that identity. For example, A strong and exclusive AI can also lead to overtraining (Schmid et al., 2024). Edison et al. (2021) found that during injuries youth with more exclusive athletic identities had higher Beck Depression Scale scores. If an athlete has an exclusive athletic identity

and has a forced cessation of sport, then they are at great risk of emotional crisis. As illustrated by the above Michael Phelps quote, an exclusive AI can be detrimental to an athlete's mental health during periods of transition, such as retirement or injury (Sabiston et al., 2019). As noted above, mastery goal orientations can mediate the effects of identity crises, but identity differentiation interventions during the sport career provide stronger protections during transitional periods.

Mental Skills Training

Mental Skills Training (MST), often used synonymously with Psychological Skills Training is the set of cognitive behavioral techniques and stress management tools used to enhance performance (Munroe-Chandler & Guerrero, 2019). These programs can include skills such as self-talk, imagery, goal-setting, arousal regulation, focus/concentration which address core performance aspects such as confidence, mental toughness, achievement drive and self-awareness (Weinberg & Williams, 2021). As athletes progress in levels of sport, physical differences begin to decrease, and the differences in psychological skills make a greater impact. However, mental skills competencies may be taught at any developmentally appropriate age but are ideally initiated in the pre-season period (Weinberg & Williams, 2021). Both coaches and SPP practitioners may be the facilitators MST programs because coaches spend more “face time” with athletes, so it is important to get “buy in” from the coaches. Mental skills training is an integral part to the holistic approach to athletic training.

Chapter 2: Performance Routines

"The will to win is important, but the will to prepare is vital."

-Joe Paterno

Performance Routines

Performance routines are a collection of focused cognitive and physical preparations that can take place before a performance, directly before a skill execution, or after a performance (Rupprecht et al., 2021). These routines have both behavioral and mental components. A recent (2021) meta-analysis found that pre-performance routines improved performance across a range of studies in both single- and multi-step routines (Rupprecht et al. 2021). Mentally, pre-performance routines can improve performance by decreasing cognitive stress and anxiety. Physically, technique training cannot substitute for physical preparation, and pre-performance and pre-skill routines help initiate precision and activation in execution (Perry & Katz, 2015). Routines are also versatile in the fact that they are beneficial for both closed-skill and open-skill performances (Cohn, 1990). Athletes should mind the difference between routines and superstitions. A superstition is task that is not relevant to the activity performed but is given mystical power over the activity. For example, using a specific article of clothing for every game or putting on your right shoe first every time. Routines on the other hand, keep athletes thoughts and behaviors task-relevant and balanced.

Theoretical Basis

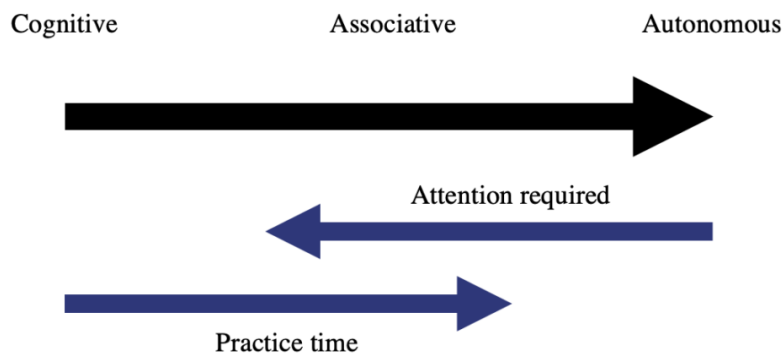
The theoretical basis of routines is generally related to the automaticity of skills. Fitts and Posner's (1967) stages of motor learning model encompasses three stages of learning: cognitive, associate and autonomous. In the cognitive phase athletes perform skills consciously and sequentially until they are making only minor technical adjustments in the associative phase and the execution becomes more fluid. In the autonomous phase, athletes perform the skill unconsciously and are therefore able to focus on external factors such as strategy and adaptation. The autonomous phase is synonymous with the lay term "muscle memory" because memory is

stored in the motor areas of the brain and not in the muscles themselves. The brain creates mental frameworks or “schemas” (Schmidt, 1975) later called chunking (Neves & Anderson, 1981) where sequential elements are incorporated into a single representation. Masters’s (1992) conscious processing hypothesis (CPH) posits that performance anxiety causes athletes to try to gain conscious control their normally automatic skills, which causes them to return to an early phase where skills are performed less fluidly. Performance routines work because they cue automatic process from practice into the performance context. They structure attention and reduce the cognitive load through task relevant cues that reduce conscious control.

Developing Individual Performance Routines

Performance routines must take several factors into consideration: the nature of the task, skill level of the athlete, and individual preferences (Cohn, 1990). Pre-performance routines should include multiple steps that prepare the athlete both mentally and physically for a performance and how they respond to unexpected situations (see *Pre-performance Worksheet in Workbook*). Athletes may want to include how many hours of the sleep they need, what types of food they should eat before the event, and how they will use breaks in their event. Youth athletes can request that their coach prescribes a specific physical warm-up, while advanced athletes should write down every step of their physical warm-up. Advanced athletes should consider whether their specific sport and optimal individual physiological zones require them to “get hyped” mentally or “stay calm.” Single skill (pre-shot) routines are best created after an athlete has mastered a skill technically. The most effective single-skill routines include holistic cues encompassing the global kinesthetic aspects of the skill and are completed immediately prior to execution (Mullen & Hardy, 2010). Holistic cues keep the brain using automatic processes instead of conscious part-processing (see *Holistic Cue Worksheet in Workbook*). Athletes should

start using holistic cues once they have become skilled enough to perform skills fluidly. Post-event routines should include how the athlete will “cool down” both mentally and physically. It is highly beneficial to include a post-event reflection for self-awareness and improvement purposes, and they should be tailored to the individual athlete (Chow & Luzzi, 2019). Some common elements of the post-event reflection are reinforcing strengths and identifying adjustments, rating mental skills, arousal levels, and open-ended reflections. All performance routines should be made in consultation with an athlete’s coaching staff and be aligned with their goals.



<https://sportscienceinsider.com/stages-of-learning/>

Chapter 3: Self-Talk

“I’ve never lost a game. I just ran out of time.”

– Michael Jordan

Self-Talk

Self-talk is anything an athlete says to themselves to motivate and support actions and interpret what they feel or observe (Williams & Hacker, 2021). It can be the automatic internal dialogue or planned and purposeful cues, instructional or motivational. Across the board, studies have shown that self-talk improves performance through increased confidence, cognitive arousal, instructional purposes and anxiety control (Williams & Hacker, 2021; Zourbanos et al., 2009). Self-talk can ease the physical symptoms of anxiety and increase state self- confidence and self-efficacy (Walter et al. 2019). It has been shown to increase endurance capacity and executive function in less-than-ideal conditions such as heat (Wallace et al. 2017). Self-talk facilitates almost any part of the learning process and any moment in the athletic career, if tailored correctly to the situation. Instructional self-talk brings kinesthetic awareness to first the sequencing and then the flow of skills once mastered. Approaching the athletic context as a whole, even the youngest athletes can use simple motivational phrases, such as “Let’s go!” to promote arousal, while more experienced athletes use defined and practiced pre-competition scripts and may target in-competition challenge areas with holistic cues. Once an athlete becomes aware of their self-talk, it is one of the most dynamic mental skills for practitioners to teach.

Theoretical Basis

The theoretical mechanisms of self-talk can be traced back to Ellis’ Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT; 1957), the original form of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). REBT posits that our beliefs about events dictate our emotions, rather than the events themselves. Irrational beliefs cause maladaptive thought patterns, which is manifested as negative self-talk. Negative self-talk affects athletic performance as well as self-esteem and can

lead to depression symptoms in extreme cases (Hays et al., 2010). Examples of irrational beliefs in athletes are black and white thinking, value depending on achievement, and perfectionistic expectations. Maladaptive thought patterns can be resolved through cognitive restructuring where the underlying irrational beliefs are identified and refuted (Hays et al., 2010). Therefore, a thought pattern may be changed from “I am a bad athlete” to “I had an unfortunate performance today.”

The reason these changes in self-talk patterns improves performance may be related to the athlete’s perception of self-efficacy. Albert Bandura’s (1977) self-efficacy theoretical framework hypothesizes that a person’s efficacy expectations affect behavior by determining their effort level. When a person expects success, they initiate coping mechanisms to achieve that goal (Bandura, 1977). Conversely, negative cognitive appraisal of threatening situations can cause avoidant behavior. Bandura (1977) suggests that modifying cognitive appraisal can alleviate avoidant behavior by changing what the person believes about the situation, much like Ellis’ REBT. Robin Vealey (1986) developed the idea of self-efficacy further by defining the operationalization of “sport-confidence” as it relates to athletes’ perception of their ability to achieve success. How an athlete defines competence and success is more important than the objective level of confidence (Vealey, 1986). Therefore, what we tell ourselves is more consequential than the reality of the performance itself.

Self-Talk in Practice

Choosing the right kind of self-talk is essential. While negative self-talk has not been shown to cause performance declination (Tod et al., 2011), interventions including self-talk psychoeducation facilitate performance more than those that do not (Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2011). For example, Turner and colleagues (2018) found that rational self-talk facilitated putting

better than irrational self-talk. Meta-analysis shows that instructional self-talk is more beneficial for fine motor skills and motivational self-talk is more beneficial for gross motor skills, with self-talk being the most beneficial for novel, overall fine motor-oriented tasks (Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2011). Practitioners can use the Automatic Self-Talk Questionnaire for Sports (*see workbook*) to assess the content and structure of the existing athletic self-talk (ASTQS; Zourbanos et al., 2009). After establishing the self-talk patterns based on the scoring map, interventions target the challenge areas.

Creating a general self-talk script will be useful for athletes needing motivational self-talk. Instructional self-talk should be discussed in consultation with the coach, as every sport and every coach has its specific nuances and technical styles. Because instructional self-talk is highly specific to the athlete and sport, writing a log or journal after lessons or classes with technical content will be useful for the SPP to facilitate creating these scripts. The Self-Talk Script Development worksheet (*see workbook*) builds a general affirmation script that can be read daily, recorded and listened to, or posted as a visual for the athlete to repeat until it becomes automatic. When instructing the client on the worksheet, the SPP and client should take the results of the ASTQS into account when choosing focal areas for the script. For example, an athlete who scored low in the anxiety control box of the ASTQS, may want to choose area six “Reframe negative thoughts” on Section one of the script worksheet. Athletes scoring high in the ASTQS irrelevant thoughts box may want to consider creating short recall or reset scripts to redirect their attention to task-relevant foci. Whether self-talk is motivational or instructional it should be regularly monitored and assessed by both the athlete and SPP.

Chapter 4: Goal Setting and Goal Implementation

“Set realistic goals, keep re-evaluating, and be consistent.”

- Venus Williams

Goal Setting

Goal setting is one of the most widely used and accessible sport and performance psychology (SPP) tools. It is what brings a dream into reality by providing framework for marking every step in the journey to achieve the dream. A goal is the objective of an action designed to meet a prescribed standard of competence, usually within a certain amount of time (Locke & Latham, 2002). Locke and Latham's (2002) mechanistic theory proposes that goals aid performers in four ways: (1) direct attention and action to the task, (2) encourage effort, (3) facilitate persistence, and (4) generate new learning skills. Cognitively, goals that focus on outperforming oneself encourage realistic expectations which facilitate optimal levels of confidence, motivation, and cognitive anxiety (Burton, 1983). Motivation and goal setting influence each other bi-directionally where each can both facilitate and inhibit the other.

Achievement Goal Theory

The underlying mechanisms of how we set goals is grounded in how an individual defines success. Achievement goal theory has a deep and broad research history in applied psychology hinging on the definition of achievement. The most widely accepted early model was educational psychologist Nicholls' (1984) dichotomous conceptualization of goals as either task- (focusing on self-improvement) or ego- (superiority over others) oriented. Nicholls (1984) argued that the definition of achievement should center on an individual's conception of success rather than objective measures of success. Although there have since been many models of achievement goal orientations, one of the most widely accepted current models is Elliot and McGregor's (2001) 2x2 achievement goal framework, which proposes an approach or avoidance valence to the dichotomous model. Their model divides competence definitions into mastery, or intrapersonal improvement, and performance, or normative comparison and uses the valence of

approaching success or avoiding failure to complete the square, creating the goal orientations: mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance, performance-approach, and performance avoidance.

The most effective achievement goal profile is high task and high ego because it gives the performer a wider range of opportunities for success, and it may insulate high ego-oriented performers from negative performance results (Duda & Treasure, 2021). Duda and Treasure (2021) highlight that perceived ability can also be an insulating factor for ego-orientations. However, the desire to not appear incompetent as compared to others, or ego-avoidant, carries the most risk of negative thoughts and behaviors because it is associated with low intrinsic motivation and fear of failure (Duda & Treasure, 2021). Focusing on task/mastery goals is related to higher levels of state confidence, and focusing on objective outcomes is related to lower levels of state confidence, likely because of the lack of control and instability of objective performance outcomes (Vealey, 1986).

Types and characteristics of goals

In his summation of goal setting literature, Gould (2021) establishes three types of goals: outcome, performance, and process. Outcome goals are the results of a performance. Performance goals focus on improvement relative to oneself. To note, Gould (2021) uses the term “performance” in the sense Elliot and McGregor’s (2001) 2x2 achievement goal framework term “mastery;” and Elliot and McGregor use the term “performance” in the same manner as Nicholls’ (1984) “ego.” Thereby, this paper uses the term mastery to indicate comparison to oneself and ego/outcome to indicate comparison to others and will hereafter discard the term “performance” as it relates to goal orientation. Process goals focus on technical actions during performance. Mullen and Hardy (2010) further delineate process goals into sequential and holistic process goals depending on the mastery level of the athlete. When learning a new skill,

the brain still processes kinesthetic information sequentially, so technical goals must be highly specified to each part of the whole skill. Whereas, when an athlete attains mastery of a skill, the goal should encompass the general kinesthetic sense of the movement to not initiate conscious processing (Mullen & Hardy 2010).

The nature of goals can vary depending on the individual and specific performance context, but there are generally proven characteristics of successful goal frameworks. For example, specific goals have been routinely proven to produce better results than “do your best,” (Locke & Latham, 2002). Goals should be moderately difficult because they correlate with the amount of effort engaged in achieving them, but they should not exceed a performer’s objective ability (Gould, 2021). Timeframe may be short or long term, ranging from momentary goal recruitment within a performance context to years long processes. Short term goals help performer’s see more immediate improvement whereas long-term goals facilitate persistence (Gould 2021). If a performer is participating in a team sport, there may also be both team and individual goals. The most effective goal setting model will have an overall objective supported by each type of goal with short- and long-term time frames.

A note about S.M.A.R.T. goals

S.M.A.R.T. goals were originally coined by the business consultant George Doran in 1981 (as cited by Swann et al., 2022) as the mnemonic device to represent goal framework: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ssignable (to a specific person), **R**ealistic, **T**ime-bound. As the “assignable” category is not applicable to personal goals, it is not commonly termed: **A**chievable. Swann and colleagues (2022) argue that SMART goals do not have theoretical or empirical support and can even be detrimental to performance. For example, they cite a 2020 Hawkins et al. study where participants with an open goal walked further than participants with a specified

goal. The new heuristic including the “achievable” element stands in direct contrast with achievement goal theory’s findings supporting challenging goals (Swan et al., 2022). In general, the SMART paradigm does not consider that there are many types of goals that may not have all five characteristics or direct goals to be approach rather than avoidant. It is widely assumed that the SMART goals are based on goal theory, but the canonical Locke and Latham (2015) label it as a pedestrian paradigm.

Creating Goals

The first step in creating an effective goals is to determine the client’s goal orientation. This may be determined through interview of the Perception of Success Questionnaire (POSQ; *see workbook*). The POSQ has been validated by Treasure and Roberts (1994), Roberts and colleagues (1998), and Tomczak and colleagues (2020). If the results show dispositional high ego-orientation, the SPP professional should take special care in helping the client identify mastery and process goals. Clients may then complete the Goal Framework worksheet (*see workbook*) to define their main objective and break it down into manageable steps.

Acknowledging the differences in how clients may visualize their journey, the final sheet of the Framework worksheet may be completed in the prescribed linear fashion or can be done using the Goal Ladder or Goal Staircase visuals (*see workbook*). The professional should then review these worksheets with the client to assure that there are outcome, mastery and process goals and plan for follow up assessments. It will be important to modify goals that become unrealistic or no longer serve the objective. Lastly, the professional should evaluate the performance environment to identify inhibitive and supportive social connections.

A note on professional philosophy

In my extensive athletic experience, I have found that our personal definitions of success are paramount to how we move through the performance space. It is informed by our athletic identity, personality traits, and environment. These definitions can provide protections from high-risk dispositions such as perfectionism. They can facilitate an athlete to push farther than they think or have been told they can grow. As the above research concludes, goals should reflect how each individual views success and be grounded in their current and future perceptions of competence. The most decorated American figure skater in history, Michelle Kwan, never won an Olympic gold medal. She is often quoted saying that she “won the silver medal;” she didn’t “lose the gold medal.” As one of the most successful and celebrated figure skaters of all time, her goal was most certainly to win the Olympic title. But she was able to adjust her vision to still gain satisfaction with her accomplishments. As professionals, it is our duty to help protect athletes through their perceptions of success, and we must, therefore, direct special attention to the process of creating their personal goal models.

Chapter 5: ~~Mental Toughness~~ Psychological Resilience

*“I really think a champion is defined not by their wins
but by how they can recover when they fall.”*

- Serena Williams

Performers will face many setbacks during their career, so it is important that they have a way to process those challenges in a way that does not compound the negative effects. As a practice we prefer the term psychological resilience over the term mental toughness. We find that “resilience” denotes a more positive approach to the ability of a performer to “bounce back” after encountering challenges. The negative connotation of the term “toughness” is embedded in the implication that if something is not “tough” then it will break. Whereas, if something is not resilient then it will change. We prefer to see the extreme as something that is adaptable rather than an end point. As psychological resilience may be applied in the general sense to global mental health and to specific psychological contexts, there exist many definitions. Özdemir’s (2019) definition strikes as the most applicable to performance contexts with her use of the term “self-recovery,” (pp. 47). Self-recovery is characterized by the “positive perspective (athletes) develop in order to revert back against the challenges...,” they may face in any aspect of the performance context (Özdemir, 2019; pp.47). Resilience is important for facilitating persistence because a performer without resilience will be defeated by their challenges and eventually give up.

Theoretical basis

We will use the literature on both psychological resilience and mental toughness as theoretical basis for the construct of resilience because they are both used to explain how performers continuously handle challenges and setbacks to maintain a balanced psychological state. Interest in mental toughness seem to stem from athletic stakeholders’ prioritization and description of the construct, versus the primary interest from the research community. This may explain why very little of the literature offers foundational theory for their exploration of the constructs of mental toughness because the quality is more historical in nature than theoretical.

Much of literature focuses on determining the components of mental toughness, which have numbered up to 12 (Gucciardi et al., 2009). The most streamlined approach has been the Clough and colleagues (2002) 4C's construct: confidence, control, commitment and challenge, but this strikes as paradigmatic and overly general.

Gucciardi and colleagues (2009) have offered the lens of personal construct psychology to explain the mechanism of mental toughness. Personal construct psychology (PCP; Kelly 1955/1991) states that people make sense of the world through mental representations (constructs) formed by previous experiences, and they use these bipolar constructs to predict events and behavior (as cited by Gucciardi et al., 2009). Using PCP Gucciardi and colleagues (2009) propose that mental toughness is a phenomenological state and not a personality trait because our constructs are constantly changing based on the PCP events loop where we appraise an event, receive external and internal feedback, and then adapt our constructs as necessary. This leads to the conclusion that cognitive appraisal (as part of the event processing cycle) is an important factor in resilience. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) propose that stress responses are not determined by events themselves but an individual's perception of the event through determining if the event is irrelevant, positive, or threatening and then assessing if they have the resources to cope with the event. Levy and colleagues (2012) suggest that mental toughness moderates threat appraisal. Taken alongside Kelly's PCP (1955/1991), these results may imply a bi-directional relationship between mental toughness and threat appraisal whereby a mentally "tough" performer may assess situations as less threatening, and a less threatening cognitive appraisal could strengthen resilience.

Another reason for the lack of cohesive theoretical analyses of resilience is the sheer number of descriptive factors contained in the construct. If we use the 4C's framework (Cough et

al., 2002) as the lowest common denominator, cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) only explains the “challenge” component. Alfred Bandura’s self-efficacy theory (1978) could be used in the “confidence” component whereby a person’s belief in their ability to accomplish tasks can dictate confidence. A performer’s goal orientation will affect their “commitment.” The very general component “control” is broken into life control and emotional control which are governed by vastly different theoretical frameworks. Taking only the sub-term life control, we can relate the need for autonomy in Deci and Ryan’s self-determination theory (1985). In short, the breadth of qualities identified as parts of mental toughness and resilience make it difficult to parse a dominant theoretical explanation.

Assessing Psychological Resilience

Being more of a historical concept and encompassing a broad range of characteristics makes psychological resilience difficult to quantify. It is not surprising that psychological resilience has been shown to increase with sport experience (Stoyanova et al., 2025) because less experienced athletes have had less trials to process. Female athletes generally score lower than male athletes in resilience, and athletes participating in combat sports have higher resilience than those in individual and team sports (McManama et al., 2021; Özdemir, 2019; Stoyanova et al., 2025). These results follow a similar logic where the higher the potential for setbacks (i.e. gender inequality and getting hit by an opponent) the greater the need for resilience. With that in mind, the practitioner should get a sense of the client’s psychological resilience based on the initial sessions by listening to how they respond to their current and setbacks. While there exists mental toughness and psychological resilience questionnaires and scales such as the Mental Toughness Questionnaire -48 (MTQ-48; Clough et al., 2002b) and the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC; Gonzalez et al., 2016), they are likely more useful as variable measurements for

research because the practitioner's work is in the nuance rather than the measure. To further engage the client in exploring the sources or challenges to their resilience, they may fill out a the Psychological Resilience worksheet (*see workbook*) describing their best and worst moments and thinking about why they chose to keep going in their sport. This worksheet will help initiate a conversation about what gives the client strength.

A Note About Self-Compassion and Psychological Resilience

One of the reasons we prefer the term “resilience” over “toughness” is that most successful performers are their own worst critics. Being mentally tough runs the risk that a performer may start ignoring both mental and physical signs that they need to re-evaluate their motivation or rest their body. “Toughness” may also lead athletes to unsafely pushing through injury (Johnson et al., 2022). The mental toughness label may also play into the stigma in athletic contexts of receiving mental health services because some athletes may equate toughness with not needing to ask for help (Gucciardi et al., 2017). Because adversity is a core aspect of performing, performers need to find a balance between adapting to a challenge and accepting the negative impacts of a challenge with kindness (Kosirnik et al., 2022). Self-compassion can serve as a buffer for the psychological impact of negative events (Ceccarelli et al., 2019). It can be even more powerful than self-esteem as a counterbalance to mental toughness (Johnson et al., 2022). Self-compassion breeds resilience, so any work we do on resilience will be strengthened by identifying moments where kindness fortifies more than toughness.

Chapter 6: Concentration, Focus and Managing Distraction

*“I don’t focus on what I’m up against.
I focus on my goals and try to ignore the rest.”*

-Venus Williams

*“It is not a daily increase, but a daily decrease.
Hack away at the inessentials.”*

-Bruce Lee

Focus, Concentration, and Managing Distraction

The performance context is full of stimuli which can entice or demand attention, and performer must have the ability to choose which stimuli is most beneficial for their individual performance. Attention, focus, and concentration are also used synonymously in the sport context, but they are different concepts. Attention is the direction of what one is observing. Focus is then the central point or subject of the attention, and concentration is then sustaining focus on the task at hand (Zeplin et al., 2014). Managing distraction and focus are also used synonymously where managing distraction has a negative undertone and focus has a positive one. Focus implies a choice of where to give attentional energy, and at times focus should be shifted to what could be thought of as a “distraction” to mentally reset.

A Note About Skill-Level

While the ability to concentrate on the learning process is an important factor in mastering skills, concentration as well as focus and managing distraction are most useful for performers who have acquired the general skills to engage in their respective performance context. Because concentration is the directed and sustained attention to the appropriate stimuli (Williams & Bhalla, 2021), a performer must be out of the sequential learning stage in order to have the cognitive capacity to direct attention to a broad range of stimuli. A performer’s technical execution must be analyzed before it can be determined if a performer is directing attention to unhelpful stimuli because the inability to complete skills with relatively mastery will occupy most of the cognitive space needed for performance.

Theoretical Basis of Attention, Focus, and Concentration

Attention

Attention control theory (ACT) posits that directing attention to threat stimuli will decrease a performer's attention to goal-directed stimuli, causing a performance declination (Neil & Woodman, 2019). In other words, focusing on the consequences of success or failure will distract the performer from the task at hand and potentially de-rail the performance. According to Nideffer and Sagal (2006), attention has broad and narrow dimensions and internal and external dimensions, which can be diagramed in a 2x2 manner: broad-external, broad-internal, narrow-external, narrow-internal. Broad-external focus involves assessing the general external environment. Analyzing is the shift to broad-internal focus where the performer formulates a plan based on the assessment. Then, the focus may shift to narrow-internal when the performer prepares their mind for the chosen action. The action execution happens when the focus shifts to narrow-external, and the performer attends to the outward execution of a skill or tracks a specified object (Williams & Bhalla, 2021; Zeplin et al., 2014).

Focus and Concentration

Once attention is present in the performance, a performer needs to choose which part of the task to attend to – or focus on. However, focus must be chosen carefully because focusing too specifically or too broadly can result in performance declination. The conscious-processing hypothesis states that trying to gain conscious control over actions has a paradoxical effect of reverting the mastered-automated action to the earlier stage of learning where the action is performed sequentially (Neil & Woodman, 2019). Mullen and Hardy's (2010) findings show that part process goals trigger conscious processing and disrupt the flow, so narrow-external foci should be on holistic cues (or general kinesthetic) cues. The theory of ironic process (Wegner

1994) may be used to explain how we maintain concentration in that the effort to suppress an unwanted thought ironically causes it to become a fixation (as cited in Neil & Woodman, 2019). Anxiety diminishes cognitive resources and engages the automatic monitoring process which scans for threats such as the unwanted thought. Concentration occurs where the cognitive load (anxiety) is manageable and allows for the operating process, which consciously searches for a desired thought.

Training

The first step training concentration is determining a client's awareness level of which type of focus garners their best results. This may be accomplished by post-event reflections as discussed in Chapter Two. There are many challenges to managing focus, such as physiological arousal, focusing on uncontrollable factors, and simply choosing the wrong attentional type (Williams & Bhalla, 2021). There may be external distractions such as audience noise or internal distraction such as negative self-talk (Zeplin et al., 2014). Choking is the rapid and uncontrollable deterioration of a performance due to physiological and psychological changes (Nideffer & Sagal, 2006). While maintaining the appropriate physiological arousal and cognitive anxiety levels may help prevent choking, it is not possible to eliminate the phenomenon. Concentration drills are numerous and vary widely in their empirical foundations. For example, concentration grids do not have consistent proof of improving performance (Greenlees, 2006). They are potentially a fun way to start practicing concentration with younger performers as a game but are likely not useful for experienced performers who need more specified training. We have included a sheet (*see Focus Ideas in Workbook*) with general focal exercises to start the process of finding what works best for the client. Next, the client can fill out the Concentration Drills Activity worksheet (*see Workbook*), which gives them autonomy and agency in deciding

how they want to improve focus and concentration. They will first identify what is distracting them and then collaboratively discuss with the consultant which strategies, such as competition simulation or mental rehearsal, would help improve that area. Alternatively, more anxious clients may want to fill out the Worry Stopper Grid (*see Workbook*) to help parse out which of their distractions are factors under their control and which they must accept.

Chapter 7: Imagery

“Mental rehearsal is just as important as physical practice.”

-Kobe Bryant

Imagery

Imagery is the mental representation of an event or an action in one's mind (Jeannerod, 1994). In sport, this means the ability to practice skills and performances without physically being there in the sport context. It can be the re-creation of a past performance or the creation of a new one. It can be one specific skill (such as a tennis serve) or an entire performance (such as a figure skating routine). Athletes use imagery to improve motivation, confidence, flow, attention control, and decision-making (Vealey & Forlenza, 2021). Many athletes use imagery without realizing it, such as imagining winning a gold medal or mentally rehearsing a free throw right before letting go of the ball. The terms mental imagery and visualization are frequently used synonymously but have a slightly different connotation. Whereas visualization is the purely mental images, imagery encompasses a multisensory experience where the individual represents all the senses in the image.

There are many types of imagery with different perspectives. The Sport Imagery Questionnaire (SIQ; Hall et al., 1998) categorizes imagery into five types: cognitive general, cognitive specific, motivational general arousal, motivational general mastery, and motivational specific. Cognitive general and cognitive specific relate to the technical aspects of sport and the representations of strategy and specific skills, respectively. Motivational imagery represents the emotional and physiological aspects of the performance. Arousal imagery focuses on the physiological state, and mastery imagery focuses on confidence and coping mechanisms. Motivational specific imagery focuses on goal-oriented behavior. Research has shown that both the internal and external point of view in imagery is effective. External imagery is most useful for precision tasks, and internal imagery is most useful for perceptual tasks (Vealey & Forlenza, 2021).

Theoretical Basis

Imagery is an interesting skill in that much of the theoretical basis is validating rather than foundational. The concept of representing events in one's mind has existed for thousands of years, most famously by Aristotle. Aristotle proposed that mental images were the primary initiation for behavior; they formulate the plan to determine the action (Roumbou, 2017). There is anecdotal evidence of successful athletes using imagery to enhance performance such as Michael Phelps and Lindsey Vonn (Vealey & Forlenza, 2021). Creating mental images can also help advance expertise by increasing the intricacy and efficiency of the representations (Schack & Mechsner, 2006; as cited by Vealey & Forlenza, 2021). While historical and anecdotal evidence is not as highly valued scientifically, athletic and performing communities tend to be tight-knit and value what has worked in the past or worked for members who they perceive as successful.

Empirically, imagery is supported by neuroscientific research. Imagery activates the same areas and processes in the brain as the physical action or event in reality (Dijkstra & Fleming, 2023; Jeannerod, 1994). The activation of these systems strengthens the neural pathways associated with physical actions, improving performance through technical mastery (Vealey & Forlenza, 2021). To illustrate this, Kosslyn and colleagues (2001) found that mental imagery stimulated the same physiological responses to emotional events such as increased heart rate and breathing rates. Bio-informational theory (Lang, 1979) explains why it is necessary to not only represent the action but also an athlete's reaction. Representing the response characteristics allows the individual to modify reactions which enhances control and execution.

The When and How of Imagery

Both adults and youth athletes use imagery in practice and competition contexts (Munroe-Chandler et al., 2007). Munroe-Chandler speculated that the repeated successful execution experiences, even if they were “imagined,” would improve youth athletes’ perception of competence. This concept is consistent with Jeannerod’s (1994) proposal that imagery strengthens neural pathways in the brain, making execution more automatic. In the competition context imagery is strongly related to self-efficacy (Mills et al., 2000). Motivational imagery has also been shown to improve motivation, especially when successful achievement goals are visualized through a third person perspective (Nopiyanto et al., 2025; Vasquez & Buehler, 2007). Functional Imagery Training (FIT) encapsulates the benefits of imagery while also facilitating autonomy; it has also been shown to have longer term effects than other techniques (Rhodes et al., 2024). Because Rhodes and colleagues (2024) found that FIT is effective for athletes with low imagery ability, it follows that it would also be a good technique for athletes with low imagery experience. FIT enhances autonomy because it combines Motivational Interviewing (MI) with the instructional aspect of imagery learning. Starting the imagery learning process with MI sets an individual purpose and then puts tangible action with the plan set in place.

What distinguishes mental imagery from dreams or imagination is controllability and vividness. Controllability refers to the ability of the individual to their intended goal, and vividness refers to the level of detail in the image. The Sport Imagery Questionnaire (SIQ; Hall et al., 1998; *see workbook*) may be used as the initial assessment to gauge the athlete’s controllability and identify which of the five types of imagery they currently use. If imagery is a new skill, the consultant should consider a few sessions of guided imagery for a specific moment or skill, cuing the client to include all the senses and emotions into the image. Once the

individual understands the concept, the consultant and client may create an imagery script together using the Imagery Script Worksheet (*see workbook*). Williams and colleagues (2013) found that effective imagery scripts include the traditional five *Ws*: Who, What, Where, When and Why. It is important to identify *who* the client is, their personality traits, and their current level of imagery ability and use. Then, the time and place of the imagery should be congruent with why the imagery is performed. For example, if the goal of imagery is arousal control, then it should be engaged in immediately preceding the competitive state. *Where*, *when*, and *why* also help to plan for consistency. Lastly, the *What* is the substance of the imagery. The client should describe the kinesthetic, environmental, and emotional details of the image (Williams et al., 2013), and should write out a complete script in paragraph form upon completion of the worksheet. The consultant may wish to have the athletes track imagery for a week or two to assess the vividness of images and their commitment to the skill because repetition is a key factor in the neurobiological effectiveness of imagery.

Different types of imagery should be used at different times in the season. Motor imagery, or technical imagery should be used when learning a new skill in the beginning of the season. This will strengthen the neural pathways for the physical activation and increase automaticity. It can be used during the season if skills need technical adjustments but should not be used mid-performance or competition. Using motivation-specific imagery while setting goals in the pre-season and enhance goal salience. When the season starts, clients can mentally rehearse their pre-performance routines. This is also a good time to use strategy imagery for open-skill sports and visualization of routines or courses for closed-skill sports. During the season motivation general imagery can help maintain focus and excitement. When the season ends, it's time to reset and use imagery to correct mistakes and recall challenges to tackle for next season.

Chapter 8: Performance States

*“You must be shapeless, formless, like water.
When you pour water in a cup, it becomes the cup.
When you pour water in a bottle, it becomes the bottle.
When you pour water in a teapot, it becomes the teapot.
Water can drip and it can crash. Become like water my friend.”*

-Bruce Lee

Arousal, Anxiety, and Emotional Management

One of the primary tasks for SPP consultants is educating clients on how to manage stress and anxiety. Arousal is the general term for the body's cognitive alertness and physical readiness in response to novel information and stimuli (Pribram & McGuinness, 1975 as cited by Neil & Woodman, 2019). It is the body's physical reactions to mental appraisals, such as increased heart rate or feeling "butterflies." Anxiety is a negative emotional state that can be divided into the subcategories of cognitive anxiety and physiological anxiety. Cognitive anxiety is worry about future events and increased self-awareness about performance quality. Physiological anxiety is the automatic "fight or flight" response of the sympathetic nervous system and the somatic (physical tension) response to this nervous system activation (Cheng et al., 2009 as cited in Neil & Woodman, 2019). Performers engage in emotional management to cope with anxiety. Coping mechanisms may be problem-focused, managing demands; emotion-focused, reducing negative emotions; or avoidant, disengaging from the activity (Neil & Woodman, 2019).

Anxiety causes performance decrements in several ways. While arousal is not globally negative, stress can cause performers to become overly aroused. Excessive arousal causes muscle tension. When an athlete is under stress, their muscles may engage causing its paired muscle to also engage to counterbalance and hold that part of the body in place. This may cause that part of the body to "freeze" or "lock up" making it difficult to perform skills fluidly (Baldock et al., 2021). Cognitively, the attention control theory (ACT) proposes that anxiety causes performers to direct attention toward threat-stimuli, thereby decreasing attention toward goal-directed information. This impedes cognitive efficiency by allowing task-irrelevant information to crowd working memory (Neil & Woodman, 2019).

Flow and Clutch States

The purpose of managing arousal, anxiety and emotions is to achieve optimal performance states, namely flow and clutch states. Swann and colleagues (2017) worked toward an integrated model of flow and clutch, where they are separately defined states that may or may not occur in the same performance. Flow states have often been defined as the absence of conscious thought or “letting” the performance happen. Swann and colleagues further define the flow state as occurring in situations where there is novelty or uncertainty of the outcome, and positive performance feedback fueled increasing confidence. In this situation, performers maintained open goals. In both states, performers appraised situations as challenges, but in the clutch state, there was a moment of realization of the challenge situation, such as trailing in the score. This assessment necessitates fixed goals to gain control of the situation, such as scoring a point or winning the match. After establishing a fixed goal, performers consciously increased their effort (Swann et al., 2017).

Theoretical Basis

There have been many theories on the connection between arousal, anxiety and performance. However, most of the theories do not account for the highly individual nature of how performers experience anxiety the antecedents of peak performance. For example, in female athletes the extent to which they feel prepared and the importance they place on performing well are predictors of cognitive anxiety. Conversely, in male athletes, cognitive anxiety is linked to normative comparisons of their opponents and their chances of winning (Jones et al., 1991 as cited by Baldock et al., 2021). Therefore, the individual zones of optimal functioning (IZOF; Hanin, 2007) is the best application model for the relationship between emotions and performance. Although Yuri Hanin did not use the model to explain the relationship between

arousal and performance, the same principle may be used. Individual zones of optimal functioning explains that there is an optimal range of emotional intensity to be in the “zone,” with variability tailored to the individual athlete (Baldock et al., 2021; Woodcock et al., 2012). IZOF establishes the athlete’s personal range by graphing their emotional levels during their best performances; and any emotional states above or below the ranges can inhibit performance.

Criticisms of this model are that it does not explain why there are individual differences in optimal zones (Neil & Woodman, 2019). However, we may use the principles of cognitive appraisal (Lazarus, 1999) as an explanation. Cognitive appraisal is how an individual evaluates something they observe, as a challenge or as a threat. Threat appraisals cause anxiety. This is why one athlete may be able to have a high range of anger, while another may have a high range of tranquility. These emotions may help each of the athlete’s identify stimuli in the competitive environment as challenges instead of threats.

Management Techniques

While IZOF provides a solid framework for creating the antecedents of the flow and clutch states, it may be a difficult exercise with a new or inexperienced client. If the athlete has not been self-aware in previous competitions, there will not be a significant enough data set to complete an IZOF profile. The IZOF worksheet can identify when positive emotions cause inattention or even the necessity of a traditionally negative emotion (*see Workbook*). The consultant may have a client complete post-event reflections (as mentioned in previous chapters) to increase self-awareness and build their repertoire.

For clients who are new to SPP psychoeducation, there are many “gateway” strategies for controlling cognitive anxiety and physiological arousal. For cognitive anxiety, traditional cognitive behavioral practices like cognitive restructuring work well, specifically rational

emotive behavioral therapy techniques such as disputing irrational beliefs (Baldock et al., 2021). In this case the consultant should, have the client choose a particular negative self-talk phrase to dispute, perhaps “I suck.” They would work together to dispute and replace the phrase with a more adaptive one, like “I had a bad day.” In terms of physiological arousal, breathing exercises are one the most straightforward methods of grounding and centering a client (Baldock et al., 2021). The most common are “box breathing” in which the person inhales for four seconds, holds for seconds, and then exhales for four seconds (see *Figure 1*). Clients who are more anxious or prone to rapid breathing may benefit more from “rectangle” breathing where the exhale is twice as many seconds as the inhale, which balances the cardiac system from the rapid intake of nervous breaths (see *Figure 2*).

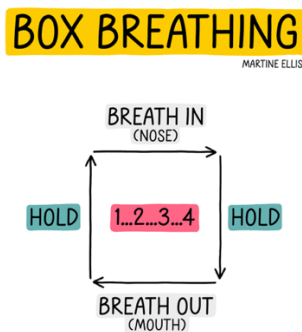


Figure 1



Figure 2

We can look at an example of a teenage fencer who is struggling in their Junior season. Juniors in high school face even more pressure as it is the most important year for college recruitment. The benefit of an SPP consultant is that we can offer more than a perfunctory, “don’t think about it.” Because clients usually want some immediate solutions, I would have them practice a breathing exercise of their choice to do before practice and then competition. Focusing on your breath makes it difficult to think of anything else. Next, I would have them choose either grounding or centering. The 5-4-3-2-1 grounding exercise has the participant find five things they can see, four things they can feel, three things they can hear, two things they can smell, and one thing they can taste; this is best completed after arriving at a competition venue. For a fencer, centering would entail shifting their body weight in the fencing position to the center and “sticking” their feet to the floor. These techniques will not solve the pressure of performing well in front of college coaches, but they may alleviate some of the temporary stressors. In session, we would then work on the irrational beliefs the fencer had about recruiting. For example, they may feel that there was no point in their fencing career if they are not recruited. We would hopefully challenge that thought by talking about all of the life lessons and skills they have learned through sport.

Specialized Techniques: Music

Elite athletes require more in-depth and long-term techniques. After an athlete has identified their IZOF profile, they can match it with the appropriate musical pairing during preparation and, when possible, practice sessions. Music has been shown to enhance performance by improving emotions, decreasing perceived exertion, increasing calmness and harmony, and increasing excitement (Akhshabi & Rahimi, 2021; Bigliassi et al., 2013). Because personal responses mediate the effect of music, the consultant and client can collaborate on

making a playlist based on the IZOF profile (see My Performance Playlist *in Workbook*). They will match the physiological and emotional responses to music on the brainstorming worksheet to the IZOF profile. For example, an athlete that needs to remain calm before a performance, may choose to listen to classical or slow tempo music to which they do not have a strong emotional response. Athletes who need to feel “pumped up” may listen to music that gives them a strong emotional response.

Chapter 9: Handling Setbacks and Challenges

“Setbacks motivate me.”

-Lindsey Vonn

Handling Setbacks and Challenges

Sport is characterized by the pursuit of goals, our purpose. And, as athletes, we are particularly susceptible to falling into the “arrival fallacy,” a term coined by Harvard-trained, former Columbia professor Tal Ben-Shahar. The “arrival fallacy” is the belief that happiness lies beyond the achievement of our goals, that happiness is a lasting destination (Linder, 2025). Winning an Olympic gold medal doesn’t make you happy; it makes you an Olympic Champion. Read that again. To be fair, much of the point of sport participation, especially once reaching the elite level, is about goal achievement, but this preoccupation can blind us to the joy that lies in learning and progress, despite an objective “failure.” This curriculum has already covered mental resilience, so here we will discuss what it means to show up every day and how we can get through the days when it feels impossible to show up. Resilience has been defined as the positive adaptation after challenges and setbacks (Galli & Gonzalez, 2015), meaning that perseverance is only part of resilience. The resilient athlete sees the potential for growth in setbacks.

Maddaus (2020) uses the analogy of a bank account when discussing resilience. All the skills discussed in previous chapters can be used to build capital in your resilience account. For instance, an athlete with a strong athletic identity will likely have “work hard” as part of the athletic schemata, which could drive them to return to practice after a perceived failure; but a rigid athletic identity that inhibits the athlete from resting will cause burnout. Self-talk is a useful way to re-establish a positive self-concept after a mistake. For example, if an ice skater falls in the middle of performance, saying things like “That was stupid” will undermine self-confidence. Phrases like, “I’m ok” or “fight on the next jump” can keep the skater focused on task relevant factors. Performance routines and imagery can prepare us for being unprepared. Goals motivate

us. These skills do not altogether prevent mistakes or setbacks, but they may be called upon during frustrating times.

How to start handling setbacks

New or inexperienced clients can start to build their resilience with a few simple exercises to call upon when encountering exercise. The *Resilience Bank Worksheet* (see workbook) includes quick activities to orient the client towards an optimistic, growth mindset. Recognizing small wins and positive things happening every day can help both the coach and client see their potential and start to give them reasons to show up the next day. They also need to accept the inevitability of failure but that it is necessary to progress. Re-orienting the automatic thoughts and reflections of setbacks towards perceiving them as learning experiences will fortify the client against negative self-worth.

Social Support: Our People

One of the most protective factors for resilience is social support (Galli & Vealey, 2008; Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014). In fact, perceived social support can be equally predictive of resilience as personal factors (Galli & Gonzalez, 2015). The coach athlete relationship can help prevent burnout when they provide tangible and informational support (Lu et al., 2016). Family support can reduce anxiety and boost mental toughness (Kiliç & Bayköse, 2018). It is important to establish a client's social support and social stressors. Eco-maps, as described in Baumgartner and colleagues (2012; *see Workbook*), are a good way to visualize a client's social web. The exercise uses different line styles and arrows to show the strength of relationships and whether they are energizing or draining. Clients can be encouraged to lean on strong relationships and either repair or set boundaries with draining relationships. The eco-map can be used in conjunction with the Perceived Available Support in Sport Questionnaire (PASS-Q; Freeman et

al., 2011) to determine the level and type of social support (*see Workbook*). Clients answer sixteen questions that are scored based on emotional support, esteem support, informational support, and tangible support. Using the eco-map, the client should identify which type of support their strong relationships provide and see who could supplement their weaker types.

Success: Our Mindset

Resilience is the setback mindset. A resilient athlete sees a setback as something that builds strength (Galli & Vealey, 2008). Following Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress coping, Parker and colleagues (2024) found that athletes' beliefs about secondary control (SC) mediated setback anxiety and rumination, especially when primary control (PC) was low. Primary control is the beliefs that we can control outcomes or our environment through our own effort; while secondary control is how we attribute setbacks that arise even after we exert primary control. In other words, sometimes we lose the game even though we worked hard, but it is just as important to accept that today the other team was better and change the tactics for the next game. Perfectionism can also play a role in how athletes define success. The consultant should monitor the client for perfectionistic striving because it can be both a protective and risk factor of resilience. Adaptive perfectionism is positively associated with resilience, and maladaptive perfectionism is negatively associated with resilience (Manasa & Varma, 2021). Resilience resides in our definition of success. Olympic bronze medalists tend to be happier than silver medalists because they perceive the contrast between getting a medal and not, while silver medalists feel like they "lost" the gold. The most decorated figure skater in U.S. history, Michelle Kwan, never won an Olympic gold medal. However, she is frequently quoted saying that she "won" the silver medal and did not "lose" the gold. She has gone on to be a United States Ambassador.

Chapter 10: Assessments and Technology

*“Technology is just a tool.
In terms of getting the kids working together
and motivating them, the teacher is the most important.”*

-Bill Gates

Assessments and Questionnaires

Assessments and questionnaires have historically been a controversial tool in sport and performance psychology with both sides using the argument that they are sterile (Beckman & Kellman, 2003; Vealey et al., 2019). Proponents tout assessments as a systematic initial measurement for psychological skills use, efficacy, and perceptions. Beckmann and Kellmann (2003) argue against using general personality trait assessments in favor of using problem-focused ones as the first step in applied practice. However, they emphasize that questionnaires are largely dependent upon the participant's belief that the results will be useful. Therefore, it is important for the practitioner to clearly explain the purpose and relevance of any assessment. This may be accomplished by pitching it as a collaborative activity that can be an opening for deeper discussions about how results connect to a client's individual experiences. For example, the idea of "mental skills training" may feel daunting to a new client and filling out a long document such as the TOPS assessment could be overwhelming, but the consultant could explain how the results will actually narrow down what skills need work in which context and also allow the consultant to highlight the client's existing strengths.

In 2004, O'Connor suggested that the scientific credibility of questionnaires had come at the expense of usability. Assessments and questionnaires should be used judiciously to gauge current use of mental skills and in circumstances where the client may be too shy to share things verbally during sessions. It is the opinion of this practice that assessments test the client's capacity for honest self-reflection and depend heavily upon the accuracy of their memory recall. Athletes may feel pressure to answer with the socially acceptable answer; or they may feel pressure to answer at all when they are not able to recall a scenario. Thus, questionnaires should be applied in a way such that clients are not made to feel like test subjects. Questionnaires are

only as useable as far as the practitioner can translate information into the nuances of an individual's experience. For example, the PASS-Q score alone will not tell the practitioner that the client has an authoritarian coach, or the parents are stressors rather than supporters.

Technology

Although it is less evidence based than questionnaires, observational data is a flexible and adaptable mode of a data collection that can be customized to the client (Holder & Winter, 2016). In this sense, technology can be a useful partner in collecting observational data when the practitioner is not physically present. Apps that track mood and biometric data, if secure help the Mental skills training (MST) apps make SPP services more accessible, most of them are not of sufficient quality to be recommended. A 2025 study found that a majority of the psychological skills training apps available on the iPhone and Android failed to meet the Mobile App Rating Scale (MARS) standards, which measures both usability and quality (Bonetti et al., 2025). The study found that the apps did not present information clearly and consistently, and users were routinely unsatisfied with the quality. They usually do not account for culture, socio-economic status, organizational standards, and so forth. In the age of AI, the main benefit of hiring an SPP profession is their ability to combine human empathy with theoretically and empirically backed methods.

Ethics of Assessments and Technology

Technology and assessments have some of the same fundamental ethical issues: 1.) Who owns the data, 2.) who has access to the data, 3.) competence of the interpreter, and 3.) what the data is being used for. The client-consultant relationship is paramount to effective SPP practice, The relationship is built on trust, which starts with confidentiality. Karkazis and Fishman (2017) note that data access and ownership can cause conflicts of interest where professional have

obligations to both the individual and the team. In the current age of professionally owned sports and youth sports, ownership of data can get complicated. The consultant may be paid by the organization or the parents, so the professional disclosures at the beginning of the relationship must identify who owns data collected for SPP sessions. Ideally, the athletes themselves own the data and the authority to give permission for data to be released to financial parties, even as minors. Data access and ownership connects with competence in that financial stakeholders likely do not have the professional competence to interpret results. Consultants should make sure stakeholders know that assessments are not meant to predict athletic results. Likewise, consultants should only use assessments and technology for which they have been trained to use or have extensive experience using. Data usage must also be laid out in the disclosure agreement to maintain a trusting client-consultant relationship. Clients would be unlikely to fill out assessments honestly if they feared the results could be submitted to coaches or recruiters without their permission for participation or admission purposes.

Our Favorite Assessments and Apps

Daylio (App)

<https://daylio.net/>

Daylio is a daily mood tracking and journaling app available on iPhone and Google Play (2025). I recommend this because it is free tracking app that does not interpret data for the user. It only stores data locally on the user's phone, so it is secure from being shared with any third parties, even the app administrators. I've used this personally since it was recommended by my own psychotherapist. What I like most about the app is that you can customize what you track such as emotions, sleep, school and chores; and there is a notes section. The photo upload and camera functions, as well as the voice note option makes the app accessible by giving audio, visual, and writing options. I would have clients use this app for a week to start to track how they

are feeling each day and make a note of how their practice went. They could use it to record automatic thoughts and interactions with their social networks. The format allows the client to retain a sense of autonomy by recording what they feel is important, and they have the choice to share their observations with me.

Values Cards

<https://www.think2perform.com/values/>

My professional philosophy is aligned with an Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) approach to consultation. The pillar of ACT is acting in accordance with one's own values, which requires first knowing what those values are. The think2perform (2025) values exercise asks the client to sort through a number of values by eliminating about half the cards in each round, resulting in their top five values. It is free, accessible online, and not stored by the website. Identity clarification facilitates conversations about conflicts in the performance context. For example, a client who values spontaneity may find the repetitiveness of a training schedule challenging. Or, a client who values fame may have extrinsic motivation and struggle with setbacks. These cards can also help athletes identify what is important to them in taking the next steps after their athletic or performance careers.

ACSI and TOPS

The ACSI and TOPS assessments are some of the most informative tools for SPP consultants. They are staple activities when clients begin services for us to pinpoint both their mental skills strengths and challenges. Most experienced athletes are relatively self-aware and have a general sense of their psychological performance quality, but they may not be able to separate different skills without specific cues. The strength of the ACSI is the mapping of the overall level of coping skills, the ability to rank the skills and then compare them relative to each other. The TOPS assessment may be more useful for more experienced or elite athletes as a

benchmark because it has the added dimensions of practice and competition contexts. The benefit of the TOPS in comparison with ACSI is the ability to use the differences in practice and competition scores to craft mental skills strategies during training because how you practice is how you compete.

PASS-Q and Eco-maps

Aside from identifying strengths and challenges in mental skills, part of the initial assessment of a new client should include an investigation of their social climate. Social connections are influential protective and stressful factors in a performer's mindset, and having a "map" of the social system at present will help the consultant be sensitive to the client's socio-cultural environment. Eco-maps and the PASS-Q are inextricable as the eco-map will tell us who and the PASS-Q tells us what kind and how much. Reflecting off the results of the PASS-Q will help clients be honest about how different relationships affect them psychologically. While there are assessments for almost any mental skill, the ACSI, TOPS, PASS-Q and eco-maps are the framework for building individualized programs and interventions.

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MENTAL SKILLS WORKBOOK

FOR ATHLETES AND PERFORMERS



BY JESSICA CRENSHAW DUNNE

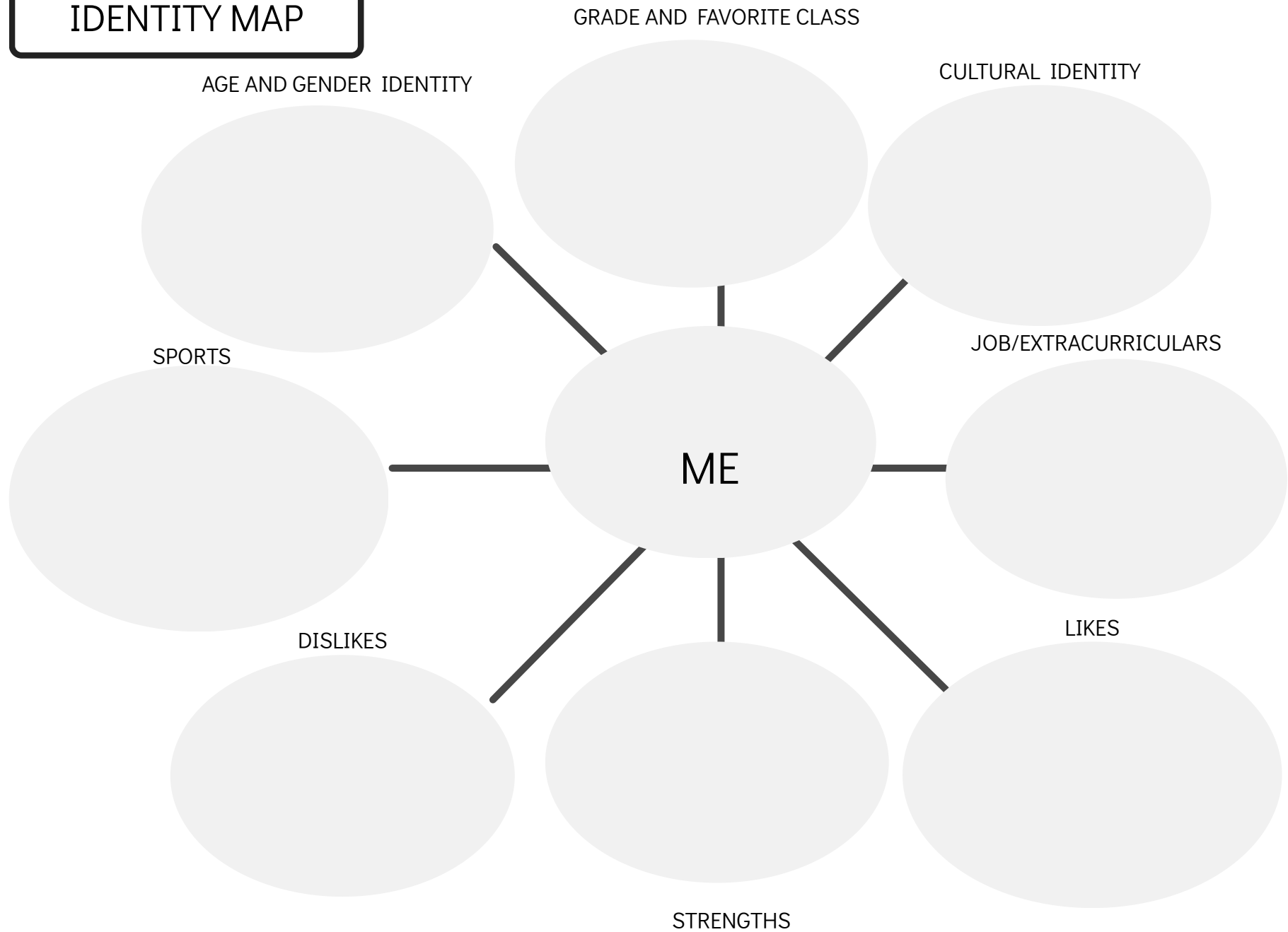
7-Item Version of the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS)

Please circle the number that best reflects the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement regarding your sport participation.

-
- | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----------------|
| 1. | I consider myself an athlete. | | | | | | | | |
| | Strongly disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Strongly agree |
| 2. | I have many goals related to sport. | | | | | | | | |
| | Strongly disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Strongly agree |
| 3. | Most of my friends are athletes. | | | | | | | | |
| | Strongly disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Strongly agree |
| 4. | Sport is the most important part of my life. | | | | | | | | |
| | Strongly disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Strongly agree |
| 5. | I spend more time thinking about sport than anything else. | | | | | | | | |
| | Strongly disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Strongly agree |
| 6. | I feel bad about myself when I do poorly in sport. | | | | | | | | |
| | Strongly disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Strongly agree |
| 7. | I would be very depressed if I were injured and could not compete in sport. | | | | | | | | |
| | Strongly disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Strongly agree |
-

AIMS Score scoring: Range from 7 to 49 (higher scores are indicative of higher levels of athletic identity).

IDENTITY MAP



Pre-Event Worksheet

1. How will I fuel my body for the event?

How long before my event do I need to eat?

What will I eat if my first choice isn't available?

2. Each step of my physical warm-up:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

How long before my event do I warm-up?

The most important part of my routine to focus on if I can't complete my full routine (e.g., *you're running late*)?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3. What do I do to mentally prepare for an event (*e.g. listen to music, breathing exercises, imagery*)

When do I do this?

What is will I do if can't do my typical mental routine (*e.g. I left my headphones at home*)

4. Things I do (mental and physical) during event breaks:

5. Anything else I'd like to add to my routine:

Time	Plan A	Plan B
Night Before Event:		
Morning:		
Travel to Venue:		
Check-in:		
Warm-Up:		
Final Preparations:		
Event Start Time		
Post-Event Recovery:		
Between Event Checks:		

Holistic Cue Worksheet

(Use the list format or the table below)

Name 3 to 5 skills you are working on:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

For each skill write one technical correction:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Now, describe the feeling of the action as a whole in one word:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Skill	Correction	Cue
<i>Lunge attack</i>	<i>Push through my back foot</i>	<i>Launch</i>

POSQ - Perception of Success Questionnaire

Perception of Success Questionnaire (Children's Version)

What does success in sport mean to you? There are no right or wrong answers. We ask you to circle the letter that best indicates how you feel.

WHEN PLAYING SPORT, I FEEL MOST SUCCESSFUL WHEN:

	Strongly agree		Neutral		Strongly disagree
I beat other people	A	B	C	D	E
I am clearly better	A	B	C	D	E
I am the best	A	B	C	D	E
I try hard	A	B	C	D	E
I really improve	A	B	C	D	E
I do better than others	A	B	C	D	E
I reach a target I set for myself	A	B	C	D	E
I overcome difficulties	A	B	C	D	E
I succeed at something I could not do before	A	B	C	D	E
I accomplish something others cannot do	A	B	C	D	E
I show other people I am the best	A	B	C	D	E
I perform to the best of my ability	A	B	C	D	E

Perception of Success Questionnaire (Adult Version)

What does success in sport mean to you? There are no right or wrong answers. We ask you to circle the letter that best indicates how you feel.

WHEN PLAYING SPORT, I FEEL MOST SUCCESSFUL WHEN:

	Strongly agree		Neutral		Strongly disagree
I beat other people	A	B	C	D	E
I am clearly superior	A	B	C	D	E
I am the best	A	B	C	D	E
I work hard	A	B	C	D	E
I show clear personal improvement	A	B	C	D	E
I outperform my opponents	A	B	C	D	E
I reach a goal	A	B	C	D	E
I overcome difficulties	A	B	C	D	E
I reach personal goals	A	B	C	D	E
I win	A	B	C	D	E
I show other people I am the best	A	B	C	D	E
I perform to the best of my ability	A	B	C	D	E

GOAL FRAMEWORK

Define your dream and create your path to achieving it.

Step 1. What is your Dream?

What accomplishment/ achievement/ experience would be worth your very best effort?

What would you attempt if you knew it was impossible to fail?

What would you go for if you knew this was your very last chance (your last season playing a sport, your last year in school, your last year on earth)?

Step 2: Know where you are right now

"I have trouble performing well when..."

"The most frustrating moment for me is..."

"I get myself screwed up when..."

"I perform my best when..."

GOAL FRAMEWORK

Step 3: Be honest about what you need to develop

In order to achieve my dream, the four most important areas I need to improve in are:

A.

B.

C.

D.

Step 4: Make a plan for daily improvement

For each of the improvement areas listed above, identify 4 specific actions that you can take on a regular basis to help yourself improve. There should be actions in each of these categories: Mastery (comparing myself to my past performances), Outcome (results), and Process (technical improvements)

Mastery

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Outcome

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Process

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Any additions

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

GOAL FRAMEWORK

Step 5: Future me statements

Alternative activity: Use the “Goal Ladder” or “Goal Staircase” worksheet to map your steps to achieving your dream or “Big” goal.

For each of the areas listed above, identify 4 specific statements about yourself that you want to be true ("my lefty shot is a canon", " I bench 250 eight times", "I get more and more confident as the game goes on", " I'm great at learning from each of my mistakes")

A. 1.

2.

3.

4.

B. 1.

2.

3.

4.

C. 1.

2.

3.

4.

D. 1.

2.

3.

4.

The Big Goal



Write your BIG goal:

Write your step goals:

Step 6

☐

Step 5

☐

Step 4

☐

Step 3

☐

Step 2

☐

Step 1

☐

Write your short-term goals on each step
and see yourself get closer to your big goal!

Big Goal:

Step 6

Step 5

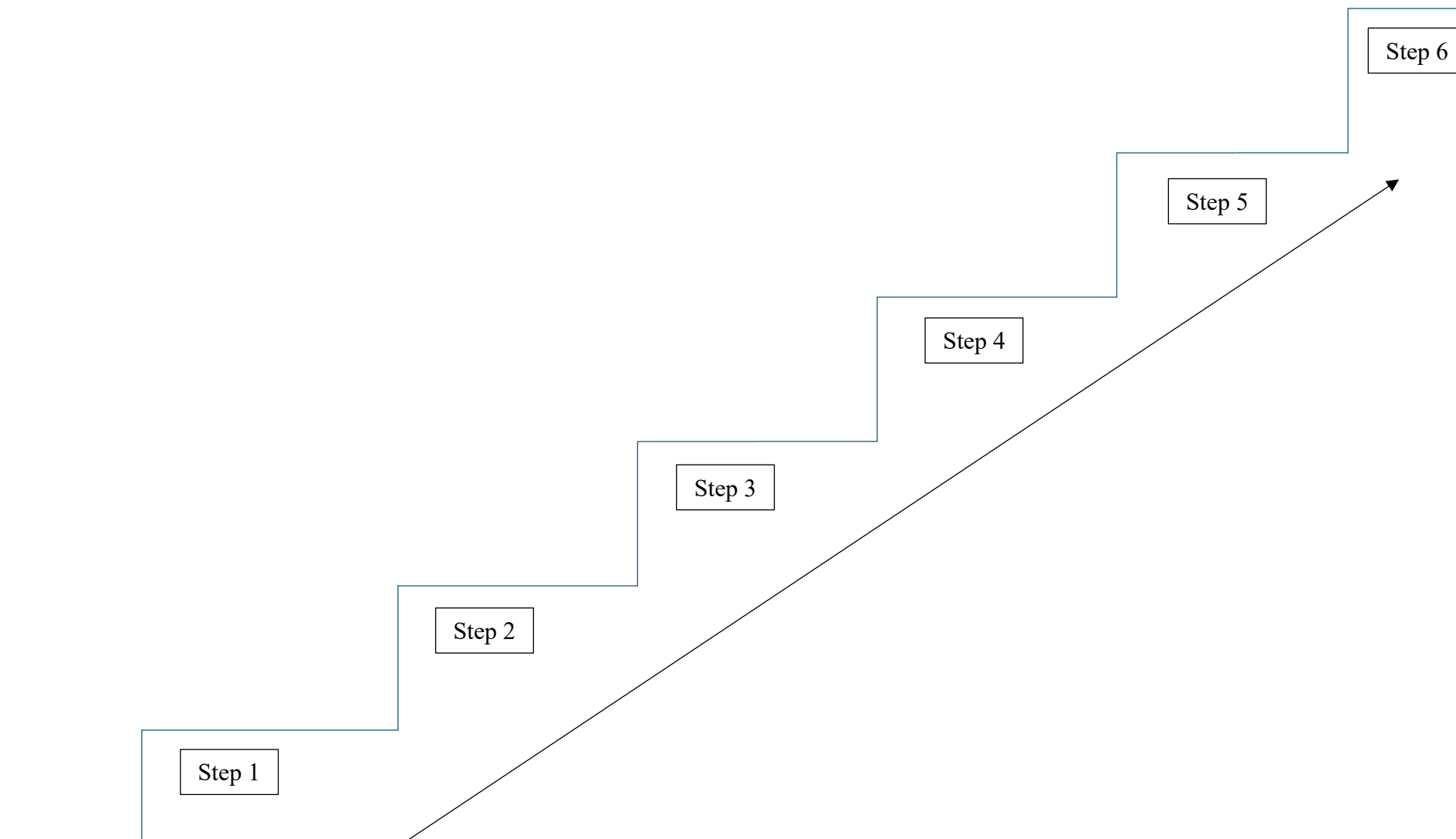
Step 4

Step 3

Step 2

Step 1

Skills I already have:



Psychological Resilience Worksheet

How do you handle setbacks and challenges?

1. Think of your best moment in your current sport.

What were your thoughts?

What were your feelings?

How did you behave?

2. Think of a time you wanted to quit your current sport.

What were your thoughts?

What were your feelings?

How did you behave?

Why did you keep going?

How did your thoughts, feelings and/or behavior change?

Focus Ideas

A. Focus on what you can control: Write down a list of all the factors in a competition, game, or performance that you can control. (*For example: what time you go to bed, what you eat, your uniform, etc.*)

B. Dress Rehearsal: Use a practice day to replicate a game, competition, or performance setting. Wear your costume or uniform. Keep score or have judges. Have an audience if possible. The more you can practice ignoring distractions and determining how to best focus for yourself, the better prepared you will be for the “real thing.”

C. Mental Rehearsal: This works well if you are not able to get your coach or organization to put on a simulation. Close your eyes and imagine effectively performing in a competitive setting. Have a partner try to distract you with (appropriate) touching, noises, or talking.

D. Mental Reset: Think of a word you can use in a break-point in your performance to reset your mind on staying present. This is particularly useful after a setback moment or even a perfect execution. (*For example: Breathe, Calm, Fight*). This may also be accompanied by a quick action like snapping or touching your equipment. It is important to use your chosen “reset” consistently during practice.

E. Physical Reset: Stand in your athletic stance and center the weight of your body in space and anchor it to the playing surface. This physical centering can center your mind by directing focus inward if you find yourself being distracted by the environment.

CONCENTRATION DRILLS WORKSHEET

DIRECTIONS: This activity includes two parts: In Part 1, you'll assess the current struggles in your own attention and concentration. In Part 2, you'll implement 2-3 strategies to address those struggles.

PART 1:

Find a quiet space to think about your chosen area for performance improvement. When it comes to your ability to focus during your “performance” in this activity, what types of distractions do you generally experience? Are they internal external, or a combination of both? Are they the result of a lack of preparation, a lack of motivation, building frustrations, a combination of these, or something else entirely? In the space below, describe the results of your personal concentration assessment:

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

PART 2:

- 1) Now that you've determined the types of challenges you experience in your ability to concentrate, we will discuss together which 3 strategies you'd like try.
(Ex. *Competition simulation, mental rehearsal, biofeedback, centering, grounding...*)

Identify your three chosen strategies below:

- 2) Keep a record of your concentration practice

Week 1

Strategy:	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.
1.							
2.							
3.							

Week 2

Strategy:	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.
1.							
2.							
3.							

Week 3

Strategy:	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.
1.							
2.							
3.							

WORRY-STOPPER GRID

		Controllable Forces	Uncontrollable Forces
Important	Not Important		
		Response: Act	Response: Accept & Act
Important	Not Important		
		Response: Eliminate & Act	Response: Integrate & Act

Sport Imagery Questionnaire

1=Never 7=Always

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| 1. I imagine other athletes congratulating me on a good performance. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 2. I image myself winning a medal. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 3. I image the audience applauding my performance | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 4. I image the atmosphere of receiving a medal (e.g., the pride, the excitement, etc.) | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 5. I image the atmosphere of winning a championship (e.g., the excitement that follows winning, etc.) | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 6. I image myself being interviewed as a champion | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 7. When I image a competition, I feel myself getting emotionally excited. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 8. I image the excitement associated with competing. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 9. I can re-create in my head the emotions I feel before I compete. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 10. I imagine myself handling the stress and excitement of competitions and remaining calm. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 11. I image the stress and anxiety associated with competing | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 12. When I image an event/game I am to participate in, I feel anxious | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 13. I can consistently control the image of physical skill | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 14. When imaging a particular skill, I consistently perform it perfectly in my mind | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 15. I can mentally make corrections to physical skills | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 16. I can easily change an image of a skill. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 17. Before attempting a particular skill, I imagine myself performing it perfectly. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 18. When learning a new skill, I imagine myself performing it perfectly. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 19. I image alternative strategies in case my event/game plan fails. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 20. I make up new plans/strategies in my head. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 21. I image each section of an event/game (e.g., offense vs. defense, fast vs. slow) | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 22. I image myself continuing with my event/game plan, even when performing poorly. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 23. I imagine executing entire plays/programs/sections just the way I want them to happen in an event/game. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| 24. I imagine myself successfully following my event/game plan. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 25. I imagine myself being in control in difficult situations. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 26. I image giving 100% during an event/game | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 27. I image myself to be focused during a challenging situation. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 28. I image myself working successfully through tough situations.
(e.g., a power play, sore ankle, etc.) | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 29. I image myself being mentally tough. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 30. I imagine myself appearing self-confident in front of my opponents. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |

Scoring Instructions

A factor analysis of the SIQ revealed five types of imagery use:

- (a) **Cognitive General (CG)**—imagery related to competitive strategies
- (b) **Cognitive Specific (CS)**—imagery directed toward skill development or production
- (c) **Motivational General Arousal (MG-A)**—imagery related to arousal, relaxation, and competitive anxiety
- (d) **Motivational General Mastery (MG-M)**—imagery representative of effective coping and confidence in challenging situations;
- (e) **Motivational Specific (MS)**—imagery that represents specific goals and goal-oriented behavior

MS: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6

MG-A: 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12

CS: 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18

CG: 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, and 24

MG-M: 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, and 30

Add specific item scores to find subscale scores.

*There is NO overall score (i.e., DO NOT add subscale scores together to find a total score)

IMAGERY SCRIPT WORKSHEET

WHO:

Name:

Age:

Sport:

Position:

Competitive Level:

Sport type:

Important personality characteristics:

Imagery Experience:

Frequency:

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	All the time
-------	--------	-----------	------------	--------------

Controllability:

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Vividness:

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

WHERE AND WHEN:

Where:

When:

Practice	Competition	Home
----------	-------------	------

Planned Frequency:

WHY: *(learn skills, improve strategy, increase confidence, control anxiety/arousal)*

WHAT:

Describe the physical aspects of the event or skill:

Kinesthetic sense (how your body feels doing it):

Describe the environment/course/venue:

Sounds:

Smells:

Tastes:

Describe the emotions:

Before:

After:

Your Individual Zone of Optimal Functioning (IZOF)

Part I

Directions: Find your IZOF by thinking about past performances and identifying your emotional state and how your body felt. You may find that you felt some of the same things in both performance types. That's ok.

1. During a great performance, I felt these emotions:

(Examples: tranquility, anger, excitement...)

My body felt:

(Examples: loose, quick, calm...)

2. During a tough performance, I felt these emotions:

(Examples: content, disengaged, anger, excited)

My body felt:

(Examples: tight, loose, slow, hyper)

Part II

A.) List all **emotions**.

B) Mark them as helpful or unhelpful

C.) Rate the intensity during your best performance and worst performance.

_____ Helpful / Unhelpful.

Best: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Worst: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

_____ Helpful / Unhelpful.

Best: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Worst: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

_____ Helpful / Unhelpful.

Best: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Worst: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

_____ Helpful / Unhelpful.

Best: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Worst: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

_____ Helpful / Unhelpful.

Best: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Worst: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

_____ Helpful / Unhelpful.

Best: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Worst: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

_____ Helpful / Unhelpful.

Best: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Worst: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

_____ Helpful / Unhelpful.

Best: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Worst: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Part II

A.) List all **physical sensations**.

B) Mark them as helpful or unhelpful

C.) Rate the intensity during your best performance and worst performance.

_____ Helpful / Unhelpful.

Best: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Worst: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

_____ Helpful / Unhelpful.

Best: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Worst: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

_____ Helpful / Unhelpful.

Best: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Worst: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

_____ Helpful / Unhelpful.

Best: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Worst: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

_____ Helpful / Unhelpful.

Best: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Worst: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

_____ Helpful / Unhelpful.

Best: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Worst: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

_____ Helpful / Unhelpful.

Best: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Worst: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

_____ Helpful / Unhelpful.

Best: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Worst: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

My Performance Playlist

Directions: Music can enhance your performance by choosing the best type of music based on your individual zone of optimal functioning (IZOF). Use this worksheet to brainstorm your performance playlist. List 3 songs in each category, and we will match them your IZOF profile.

Songs that make my feel empowered:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Songs that make me feel calm:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Hype songs:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Fight songs:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Other songs I emotionally connect with:

- 1.
- 2.

ECO-MAP

Relationship Key:

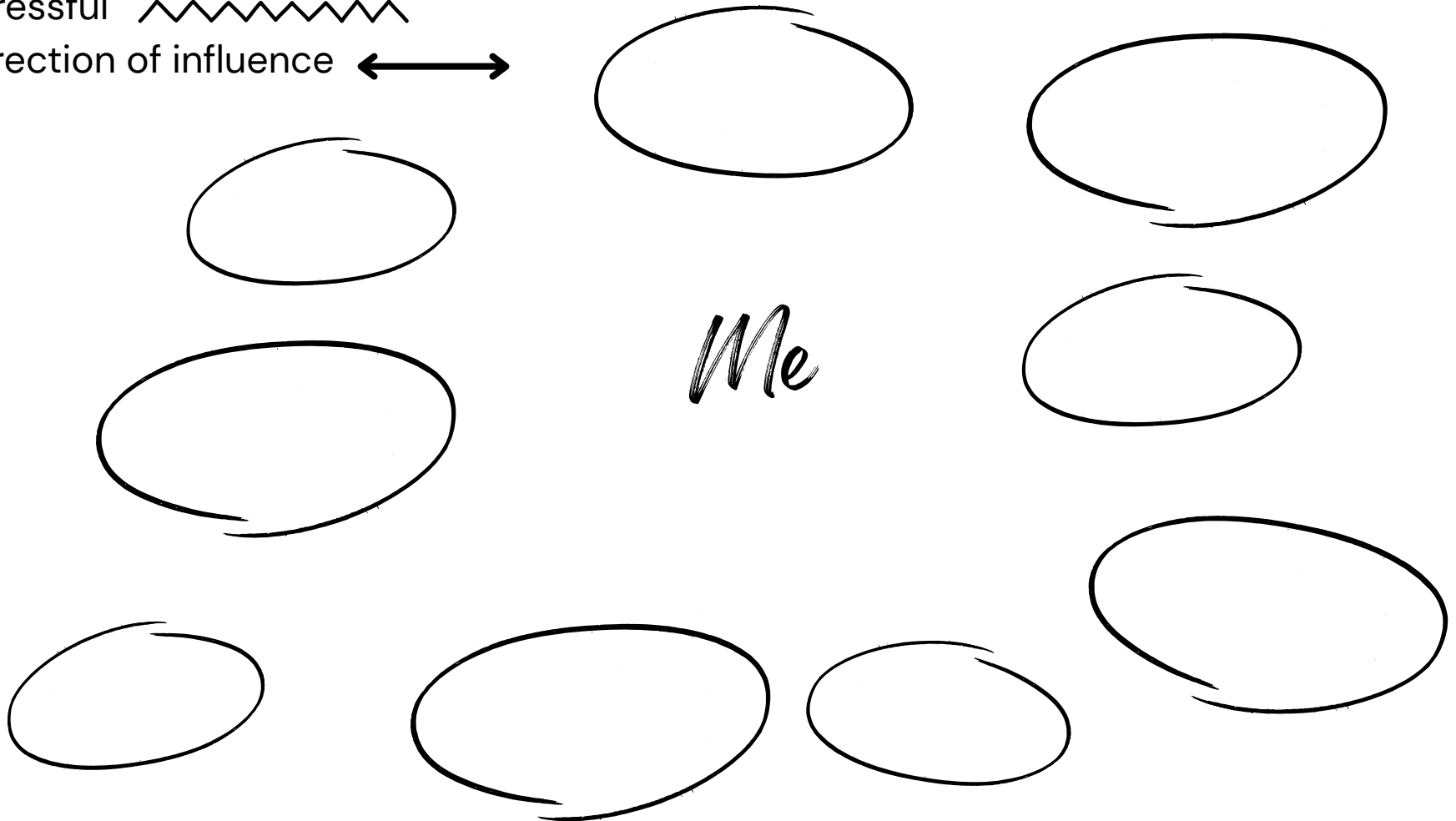
Strong



Weak

Stressful 

Direction of influence 



Directions: Write in your social connections and mark them with the appropriate line style

The Perceived Available Support in Sport Questionnaire (The PASS-Q)

Below is a list of items referring to the types of help and support you may have available to you as a sportsperson. **Please indicate to what extent you have these types of support available to you.**

0 = not at all
1 = slightly
2 = moderately
3 = considerably
4 = extremely

If needed, to what extent would someone . . .

	not at all	slightly	moderately	considerably	extremely
1. provide you with comfort and security	0	1	2	3	4
2. reinforce the positives	0	1	2	3	4
3. help with travel to training and matches	0	1	2	3	4
4. enhance your self-esteem	0	1	2	3	4
5. give you constructive criticism	0	1	2	3	4
6. help with tasks to leave you free to concentrate	0	1	2	3	4
7. give you tactical advice	0	1	2	3	4
8. always be there for you	0	1	2	3	4
9. instil you with the confidence to deal with pressure	0	1	2	3	4
10. do things for you at competitions/matches	0	1	2	3	4
11. care for you	0	1	2	3	4
12. boost your sense of competence	0	1	2	3	4
13. give you advice about performing in competitive situations	0	1	2	3	4
14. show concern for you	0	1	2	3	4
15. give you advice when you're performing poorly	0	1	2	3	4
16. help you organise and plan your competitions/matches	0	1	2	3	4

Scoring Instructions

Emotional support = (item 1 + item 8 + item 11 + item 14)/4

Esteem support = (item 2 + item 4 + item 9 + item 12)/4

Informational support = (item 5 + item 7 + item 13 + item 15)/4

Tangible support = (item 3 + item 6 + item 10 + item 16)/4

Reference for the PASS-Q:

Freeman, P., Coffee, P., & Rees, T. (2011). The PASS-Q: The Perceived Available Support in Sport Questionnaire. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, 33, 54-74..

Resilience Bank Exercises

3 Good Things

Directions: For one week, write down three good things that happened and why they happened.

The deposit: Redirect your attention to a positive mindset. Squash the negativity bias.

Character Strengths

Directions: Write down your top 3 character strengths (ex. kindness, honesty, stoicism). What is the best of you? Think about how you used one or more of those characteristics today to solve a problem.

The deposit: This builds self-efficacy. You have all the tools you need within you.

Failure is necessary

Directions: Think about your last setback (ex. a bad performance, lost match, injury).

1. Write down something you learned about yourself.
2. Write down something you learned about your game.
3. Write down something you learned about your support system.

The deposit: Growth mindset. We can only improve if something changes.

Change the thought, change the talk

Directions: Think about your last setback (ex. a bad performance, lost match, injury).

1. Write down an automatic negative thought you had. (ex. "I'm stupid." "This isn't fair.")
2. Write down how you can change that thought into something that is productive or doesn't make it personal to you or your worth. (ex. "I had a bad day." "Those were cards we were dealt.")

The deposit: Accept what you can control and let go of what you can't. Your performance does not define your worth as an athlete or a person.

Micro-wins

Directions: During your next 3 practices, write down one thing that you did well in that practice, even if you think it was inconsequential. Said hi to the new kid. Remembered the correction your coach said last week. Showed up on time.

The deposit: Builds forward momentum. A baby step is still a step. Reorient to an optimistic mindset.

Athletic Coping Skills Inventory: Assessing Your Sport Psychological Skills

Instructions: The following are statements that athletes have used to describe their experiences. Please read each statement carefully, and then recall as accurately as possible how often you experience the same thing. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any one statement.

Please circle how often you have these experiences when playing sports.

		0	1	2	3
1	On a daily or weekly basis, I set very specific goals for myself that guide what I do.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
2	I get the most out of my talent and skill.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
3	When a coach or manager tells me how to correct a mistake I've made, I tend to take it personally and feel upset.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
4	When I'm playing sports, I can focus my attention and block out distractions.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
5	I remain positive and enthusiastic during competition, no matter how badly things are going.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
6	I tend to play better under pressure because I think more clearly.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
7	I worry quite a bit about what others think of my performance.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
8	I tend to do lots of planning about how to reach my goals.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
9	I feel confident that I will play well.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
10	When a coach or manager criticizes me, I become upset rather than feel helped.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
11	It is easy for me to keep distracting thoughts from interfering with something I am watching or listening to.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
12	I put a lot of pressure on myself by worrying about how I will perform.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
13	I set my own performance goals for each	Almost	Sometimes	Often	Almost

	practice.	never			always
14	I don't have to be pushed to practice or play hard; I give 100%.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
15	If a coach criticizes or yells at me, I correct the mistake without getting upset about it.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
16	I handle unexpected situations in my sport very well.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
17	When things are going badly, I tell myself to keep calm, and this works for me.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
18	The more pressure there is during a game, the more I enjoy it.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
19	While competing, I worry about making mistakes or failing to come through.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
20	I have my own game plan worked out in my head long before the game begins.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
21	When I feel myself getting too tense, I can quickly relax my body and calm myself.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
22	To me, pressure situations are challenges that I welcome.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
23	I think about and imagine what will happen if I fail or screw up.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
24	I maintain emotional control regardless of how things are going for me.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
25	It is easy for me to direct my attention and focus on a single object or person.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
26	When I fail to reach my goals, it makes me try even harder.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
27	I improve my skills by listening carefully to advice and instruction from coaches and managers.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
28	I make fewer mistakes when the pressure is on because I concentrate better.	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

Scoring

This is the Athletic Coping Skills Inventory (ACSI), a measure of an athlete's psychological skills, developed by Smith et al. (1994). Determine your score on the following subscales by adding the scores on the question numbers identified. Also, note the following numerical scales associated with your ratings.

- 0 = almost never
- 1 = sometimes
- 2 = often
- 3 = almost always

Finally, note that an * after a question number signifies a reverse-scored item (that is, 0 = almost always, 3 = almost never, and so on).

_____ ***Coping With Adversity:*** This subscale assesses if an athlete remains positive and enthusiastic even when things are going badly, remains calm and controlled, and can quickly bounce back from mistakes and setbacks.

(Sum scores on questions 5, 17, 21, and 24, and place the total in the blank provided.)

_____ ***Coachability:*** Assesses if an athlete is open to and learns from instruction, and accepts constructive criticism without taking it personally and becoming upset.

(Sum scores on questions 3*, 10*, 15, and 27, and place the total in the blank provided.)

_____ ***Concentration:*** This subscale reflects whether an athlete becomes easily distracted, and is able to focus on the task at hand in both practice and game situations, even when adverse or unexpected situations occur.

(Sum scores on questions 4, 11, 16, and 25, and place the total in the blank provided.)

_____ ***Confidence and Achievement Motivation:*** Measures if an athlete is confident and positively motivated, consistently gives 100% during practices and games, and works hard to improve his or her skills.

(Sum scores on questions 2, 9, 14, and 26, and place the total in the blank provided.)

_____ ***Goal Setting and Mental Preparation:*** Assesses whether an athlete sets and works toward specific performance goals, plans and mentally prepares for games, and clearly has a game plan for performing well.

(Sum scores on questions 1, 8, 13, and 20, and place the total in the blank provided.)

_____ ***Peaking Under Pressure:*** Measures if an athlete is challenged rather than threatened by pressure situations and performs well under pressure.

(Sum scores on questions 6, 18, 22, and 28, and place the total in the blank provided.)

_____ ***Freedom From Worry:*** Assesses whether an athlete puts pressure on him- or herself by worrying about performing poorly or making mistakes; worries about what others will think if he or she performs poorly. (Sum scores on questions 7*, 12*, 19*, and 23*, and place the total in the blank provided.)

_____ ***Total score or sum of subscales***

Scores range from a low of 0 to a high of 12 on each subscale, with higher scores indicating greater strengths on that subscale. The score for the total scale ranges from a low of 0 to a high of 84, with higher scores signifying greater strength.

TEST OF PERFORMANCE STRATEGIES ©

Name of University _____ Age _____ Gender M F

Sport _____ Event(s)/
Position _____

Years participating in sport _____ Today's Date _____

Current performance level (circle one):

International	National	Collegiate	Regional
Junior National	Club	Recreational	Other _____

This questionnaire measures performance strategies used by athletes in various sport situations. Because individual athletes are very different in their approach to their sport, we expect the responses to be different. We want to stress, therefore, that there are no right or wrong answers. All that is required is for you to be open and honest in your responses.

Throughout the questionnaire, several terms are used which may have different meanings for different individuals. Because of this, these terms are defined below with specific examples to sport where appropriate. Please keep these definitions in mind when responding to items with these terms.

COMPETITION: a tournament/meet where individuals or teams perform against each other.

SKILL: a specific element of your sport performance. For example, free throw shooting in basketball or a jump in figure skating.

PERFORMANCE: your execution of specific sport skills during training and competition.

ROUTINE: a set of behaviors that is performed regularly in preparation for your performance in sport. An example may be going through specific stretches while listening to a song on your walkman prior to every performance.

WORKOUT: a structured practice session to work on various elements of your sport.

VISUALIZATION/IMAGERY/REHEARSAL: these terms refer to the act of picturing in your mind some aspect of your performance. An example would be seeing and feeling yourself execute a specific skill perfectly.

TOPS 2

Each of the following items describes a specific situation that you may encounter in your training and competition. Please rate how frequently these situations apply to you on the following scale:

1 = Never
2 = Rarely
3 = Sometimes
4 = Often
5 = Always

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Please put a circle around your answer					
1. I set realistic but challenging goals for practice.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I say things to myself to help my practice performance.	1	2	3	4	5
3. During practice I visualize successful past performances.	1	2	3	4	5
4. My attention wanders while I am training.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I practice using relaxation techniques at workouts.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I practice a way to relax.	1	2	3	4	5
7. During competition I set specific result goals for myself.	1	2	3	4	5
8. When the pressure is on at competitions, I know how to relax.	1	2	3	4	5
9. My self-talk during competition is negative.	1	2	3	4	5
10. During practice, I don't think about performing much - I just let it happen.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I perform at competitions without consciously thinking about it.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I rehearse my performance in my mind before practice.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I can raise my energy level at competitions when necessary.	1	2	3	4	5
14. During competition I have thoughts of failure.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I use practice time to work on my relaxation technique.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I manage my self-talk effectively during practice.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I am able to relax if I get too nervous at a competition.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I visualize my competition going exactly the way I want it to go.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I am able to control distracting thoughts when I am training.	1	2	3	4	5
20. I get frustrated and emotionally upset when practice does not go well.	1	2	3	4	5
21. I have specific cue words or phrases that I say to myself to help my performance during competition.	1	2	3	4	5

		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
22.	I evaluate whether I achieve my competition goals.	1	2	3	4	5
23.	During practice, my movements and skills just seem to flow naturally from one to another.	1	2	3	4	5
24.	When I make a mistake in competition, I have trouble getting my concentration back on track.	1	2	3	4	5
25.	When I need to, I can relax myself at competitions to get ready to perform.	1	2	3	4	5
26.	I set very specific goals for competition.	1	2	3	4	5
27.	I relax myself at practice to get ready.	1	2	3	4	5
28.	I psych myself up at competitions to get ready to perform.	1	2	3	4	5
29.	At practice, I can allow the whole skill or movement to happen naturally without concentrating on each part of the skill.	1	2	3	4	5
30.	During competition I perform on 'automatic pilot'.	1	2	3	4	5
31.	When something upsets me during a competition, my performance suffers.	1	2	3	4	5
32.	I keep my thoughts positive during competitions.	1	2	3	4	5
33.	I say things to myself to help my competitive performance.	1	2	3	4	5
34.	At competitions, I rehearse the feel of my performance in my imagination.	1	2	3	4	5
35.	I practice a way to energize myself.	1	2	3	4	5
36.	I manage my self-talk effectively during competition.	1	2	3	4	5
37.	I set goals to help me use practice time effectively.	1	2	3	4	5
38.	I have trouble energizing myself if I feel sluggish during practice.	1	2	3	4	5
39.	When things are going poorly in practice, I stay in control of myself emotionally.	1	2	3	4	5
40.	I do what needs to be done to get psyched up for competitions.	1	2	3	4	5
41.	During competition, I don't think about performing much - I just let it happen.	1	2	3	4	5
42.	At practice, when I visualize my performance, I imagine what it will feel like.	1	2	3	4	5

		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
43.	I find it difficult to relax when I am too tense at competitions.	1	2	3	4	5
44.	I have difficulty increasing my energy level during workouts.	1	2	3	4	5
45.	During practice I focus my attention effectively.	1	2	3	4	5
46.	I set personal performance goals for a competition.	1	2	3	4	5
47.	I motivate myself to train through positive self-talk.	1	2	3	4	5
48.	During practice sessions I just seem to be in a flow.	1	2	3	4	5
49.	I practice energizing myself during training sessions.	1	2	3	4	5
50.	I have trouble maintaining my concentration during long practices.	1	2	3	4	5
51.	I talk positively to myself to get the most out of practice.	1	2	3	4	5
52.	I can increase my energy to just the right level for competitions.	1	2	3	4	5
53.	I have very specific goals for practice.	1	2	3	4	5
54.	During competition, I play/perform instinctively with little conscious effort.	1	2	3	4	5
55.	I imagine my competitive routine before I do it at a competition.	1	2	3	4	5
56.	I imagine screwing up during a competition.	1	2	3	4	5
57.	I talk positively to myself to get the most out of competitions.	1	2	3	4	5
58.	I don't set goals for practices, I just go out and do it.	1	2	3	4	5
59.	I rehearse my performance in my mind at competitions.	1	2	3	4	5
60.	I have trouble controlling my emotions when things are not going well at practice.	1	2	3	4	5
61.	When I perform poorly in practice I lose my focus.	1	2	3	4	5
62.	My emotions keep me from performing my best at competitions.	1	2	3	4	5
63.	My emotions get out of control under the pressure of competition.	1	2	3	4	5
64.	At practice, when I visualize my performance, I imagine watching myself as if on a video replay.	1	2	3	4	5

How to Score the TEST OF PERFORMANCE STRATEGIES (TOPS)

Place the score for the item number on the appropriate line;

For example: if the response to item #6 is “2”, place that response in the chart below like this:

e.g.; 6 2

Do this for all 64 items, filling the 16 columns of blank spaces with numbers. Add each of the scales separately. The number represents the frequency of use of the mental skills labeled at the top of the column.

Items with an asterisk “*” are reverse-scored (so, higher subscale scores indicate more frequent use)

“PRACTICE” ITEMS

[illegible]

“COMPETITION” ITEMS

[illegible]