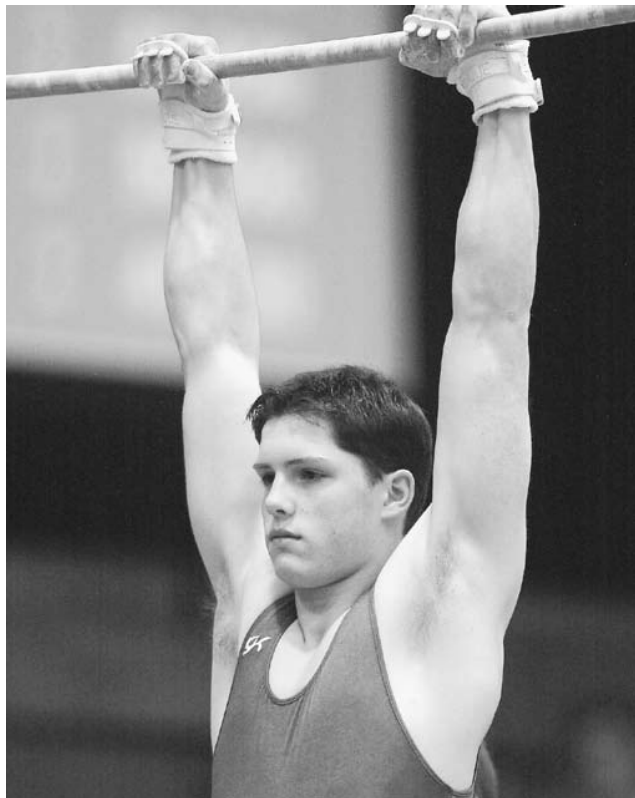


Mental Plans



When you have finished reading this chapter you should be able to

- explain mental toughness and how it helps athletes play their best under any circumstances;
- describe mental plans and their role in mental training;
- explain how mental plans help athletes create, maintain, and regain a flow mind-set to promote better performance and greater enjoyment of sport;
- lay out the benefits of mental plans;
- describe the three primary types of mental plans—mental preparation, mental performance, and mental recovery;
- help your athletes use triggers, releases, and cue words to initiate mental plans;
- explain how each type of plan is developed; and
- describe how to help athletes learn mental toughness skills through a systematic, three-phase process: education, acquisition, and implementation.

Early in my (Damon Burton's) career, I learned an important lesson about implementing mental training from Brenda, an outstanding player on our women's basketball team. Brenda's insightful discussion and outstanding performance in my applied sport psychology class confirmed that she understood and valued mental training. However, when I watched Brenda play, I was surprised at her lack of mental toughness. When things went poorly, Brenda got anxious, lowering both her concentration and confidence, and her game fell apart. I bumped into her several days later, and Brenda confirmed that she was having a hard time being mentally tough. My next question was obvious: "You know a lot about mental training. Why don't you use that knowledge to improve your mental toughness?" Her response was typical but eye-opening. "I know I'm not mentally tough, especially when things go wrong. I understand mental training and I've developed basic relaxation, self-talk, and goal-setting skills, but I'm having trouble figuring out how to use them in basketball."

This story points out a common problem with mental training. Knowing about mental training tools and skills is one thing, but integrating mental training techniques into sport and developing mentally tough athletes is a completely different challenge. Developing mental toughness in your athletes cannot be left to chance, and finding ways to implement mental skills training programs is critical to helping athletes deal with problems and adversity in competition. **Mental toughness** is the ability to play one's best in any situation, particularly when encountering problems, obstacles, adversity, or failure. It brings out the best in performers when they have the most at stake. However, mental toughness is not a single skill but a constellation of the skills discussed in earlier chapters. These skills must be integrated to promote optimal performance in challenging competitive situations. Mental toughness revolves around creating and maintaining an ideal mental performance state, a **flow mind-set**. How can you help your athletes integrate all of these skills and become mentally tough? Mental plans are the answer.

Understanding Mental Plans

Your athletes probably play well when things are going well, but can they perform at a high level when problems arise? It depends on how well they have prepared mentally. Many coaches and athletes leave mental toughness to chance, resulting in inconsistent or subpar performance and preventing athletes from

developing as much as their talent warrants. The champion athletes we've worked with leave nothing to chance. They are mentally tough because they use systematic mental and physical preparation to consistently create and maintain a flow mind-set in practice and competition. Elite performers' systematic approach to mental preparation and their execution of mental plans help them develop more fully than their counterparts who train less systematically. They also employ mental toughness more consistently when confronting adversity and enjoy their sport experience more fully. We believe athletes can develop mental toughness most effectively through systematic planning.

What Are Mental Plans?

Pioneered in applied sport psychology by Terry Orlick (1986), **mental plans** involve a series of systematic, individualized strategies designed to build mental skills into an athlete's game. Mental plans help athletes develop, maintain, or regain their flow mind-set so that they can remain mentally tough during the ebb and flow of competition and play their best. Mental plans are a means of implementing mental training tools and skills so that your athletes become more systematic in their mental, as well as physical, approaches to practice and competition.

Mental plans designed to *prepare* athletes for practice and competition (mental preparation plans) consist of steps to help them reach the mental state needed to perform their best. Athletes move deliberately through the steps—which might include goal setting, self-talk, imagery, energization, or any other mental training tool or skill—in an order that helps them personally create a flow mind-set. Mental plans for use *during* practice and competition include steps designed to maintain a flow mind-set and reach critical goals. Athletes also need to develop mental plans to help them *get back* on track when things go wrong in practice or competition.

Mental plans should become routines that your athletes follow to combine mental and physical skills in order to enhance performance. They differ from the inflexible and impractical superstitious rituals that many performers blindly follow. Such rituals control the athlete and prompt repeated robotic behavior that cannot enhance performance (e.g., put left sock on before right, or jersey before shorts; never step on lines when walking to or from the mound; always warm up with the same partner), whereas athletes are in control of mental plans and can use them to realistically promote better performance. Mental plans are based on sound research and theory and are

designed to help performers promote, sustain, and regain a flow mind-set. They enhance automaticity and mental toughness, thus helping athletes perform optimally in pressure-packed competitive situations. Mental plans are athletes' blueprints for excellence.

Benefits of Mental Plans

Mental plans benefit your athletes in many ways. Here are four of the best: creating and maintaining a flow mind-set, enhancing performance quality, increasing performance consistency, and dealing more effectively with failure and adversity. Let's look at each.

Creating a Flow Mind-Set

We believe the ultimate goal of mental training is to help athletes maximize flow experiences. The flow mind-set stimulates optimal performance, and athletes who can achieve, maintain, and regain it are mentally tough. Mental plans help them do just that. Though experiencing flow in every practice and competition is unrealistic, we want athletes to strive to attain the flow mind-set, where they are confident, optimistic, and in control when they practice or compete.

Mental plans help athletes focus on needed improvements in order to enable a flow mind-set. Targeted mental skills vary by the athlete, even on the same team. The point guard may have rock-solid self-confidence, with little trouble controlling her arousal, yet feel her concentration and motivation weaken when she performs poorly. Meanwhile, the power forward may have an easy time with concentration and motivation but need help controlling arousal, boosting confidence, and managing stress. Each player would create her own mental plan to address weak areas and to attain, maintain, or regain the flow mind-set, thus enabling personal excellence.

Enhancing Performance Quality

Mentally tough athletes seem to maintain an optimal mind-set throughout competition, whereas their mentally weaker opponents become distracted or lose confidence at critical times and thus perform poorly. The great basketball coach John Wooden always wanted his team to remain emotionally stable, eliminating the peaks and valleys that interfere with top performance. Mental plans provide athletes with the needed tool for practicing and playing with composure. When athletes experience flow, they have a better chance of achieving their goals, can concentrate intently on performance-relevant cues, are physically and mentally relaxed yet

energized, experience optimal arousal, and feel positive and worry free, so they can focus on executing automatically. These are the ingredients of optimal performance.

Increasing Consistency

Consistency in physical training leads to good physical conditioning, and athletes who follow a systematic mental training schedule experience more and better mental gains than teammates who train haphazardly. Champion athletes use a consistent mental preparation routine regardless of opponent, circumstances, or what's at stake—from practice to an easy nonconference opener to a championship game. Less successful athletes often have no plan or vary their competitive approach widely, sometimes replacing effective mental preparation strategies with less effective ones during their most important competitions. For example, a 5000-meter runner with whom I (Damon Burton) worked on stress management experienced so much stress 45 minutes before a championship race that she completely changed her mental preparation routine and performed a total relaxation session. She felt less nervous but was so lethargic that she had one of her poorest races of the season. Champion athletes perform consistently because they prepare and execute consistently, using systematic mental plans to automate the mind-set needed for top performance.

Dealing With Adversity

Even the most gifted athletes face failure and adversity, but mentally tough performers such as Anika Sorenstam, Peyton Manning, Roger Federer, and Tiger Woods consistently perform well and rise to big occasions because they plan for and deal with foreseeable problems. Handling adversity is difficult for anyone, but what seems to separate champions from the rest is their willingness to admit that competition seldom follows a script and develop plans to handle problems. Mentally tough competitors can win without their A-game. If Roger Clemens doesn't have his fastball working, he focuses on winning with his breaking stuff. When Tiger Woods isn't driving well, he uses his three wood. We'd bet you already use some mental strategies to help your athletes perform better, but perhaps like many coaches you have not been as systematic as you could be. Mental plans will help you and your athletes become systematic about mental training. Rifle shooter Launi Meili used systematic mental plans to overcome problems she encountered in Seoul and win the Olympic gold medal in Barcelona (see Launi Meili Automates Her Mental Plan and Strikes Gold on page 208).

Launi Meili Automates Her Mental Plan and Strikes Gold

Launi Meili went into the 1988 Seoul Olympics as U.S. national champion and world-record holder in three-position smallbore rifle shooting, in part because of her development and **automation** of two mental plans: a precompetition mental preparation plan and a mental performance plan based on an effective preshot routine. During the preliminary round of Olympic competition, Launi set an Olympic record and shot her way into first place. Unfortunately, a new final-round format had just been adopted in international competition that required the top eight shooters to fire 10 additional shots, each individually timed and scored to enhance the drama for the television audience. Launi had competed in this format in only two international competitions, struggling each time to adapt her deliberate preshot routine to the requirement of shooting at a faster pace. During the Olympic final, she felt rushed and shot poorly, slipping from first to sixth place and out of the medals.

Launi's frustration spurred her to commit to four more years of training so she could try again for the gold in Barcelona. This time, she refined her preshot routine to better meet the challenging demands in the Olympic finals. The routine helped her change the timing of her shift from broad to narrow focus while waiting for the command to take the next shot, thus better adjusting to the restrictive time limit in the finals. Happily, Launi's hard work in developing and automating the new routine through thousands of hours of practice—and a number of competitive trials—paid off. As before, she entered the Olympics as the reigning national champion and team world champion and set a new Olympic record in the preliminary round. But this time her highly automated preshot routine for the finals allowed her to perform well when the pressure was on, and she took home the gold.

Types of Mental Plans

As shown in Figure 13.1, the role of mental plans is to develop, maintain, and regain a flow mind-set. Mental *preparation* plans help performers create a flow mind-set before practice and competition. Mental *performance* plans help athletes maintain their flow mind-set while practicing and competing. And mental *recovery* plans help competitors regain their emotional composure and get back into a flow mind-set when they've been taken out of their game.

Mental Preparation Plans

Mental preparation plans help your athletes warm up mentally by using a structured routine to promote a flow mind-set that will enable them to practice and play at their best. Most athletes find it helpful to integrate their mental warm-up into their physical one, thus readying their mind and body together. Preparation plans include a basic plan for ideal conditions and a backup plan for use when the warm-up is constrained by time or circumstance. Your athletes' mental preparation plans should be designed like a pilot's preflight

checklist—to be worked step by step. Preparation plans for practice and competition should be quite similar, with changes made only in those steps that must differ based on the situation. This continuity helps athletes seamlessly transfer skills from practice to competition.

Mental Performance Plans

Mental performance plans are used during practice and competition to help athletes perform their best by maintaining and using their flow mind-set. They typically include a **standard mental performance plan** for use when things go well and **backup mental performance plans** to cover several common contingencies when problems occur or when the standard plan proves ineffective.

Standard mental performance plans focus on athletes' goals for practice or competition and on action plans for attaining them. These plans are usually tailored to one of three main categories of competition: races or routines, **self-paced tasks**, and **interactive sports**. For races and routines, standard mental performance plans focus on developing specific strategies to maintain a flow mind-set during each major segment of the event. Self-paced

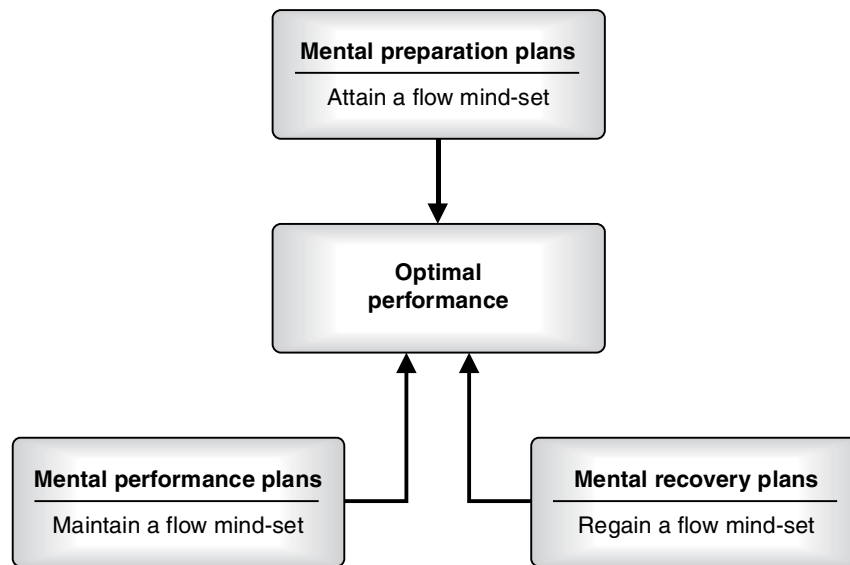


FIGURE 13.1 Mental plan model.

tasks (e.g., golf, field events, archery, basketball free throws, and tennis and volleyball serves) are repetitive, and athletes should construct and automate **preperformance** and **between-performance routines** that will maximize the quality and consistency of their performance. Finally, for interactive sports, where it is hard to predict what will happen, standard mental performance plans should focus on strategies for anticipated critical points during the contest (e.g., last 3 minutes of the game, or first play after a time-out) or for reacting to specific good or bad performance trends (e.g., after a turnover, or a run of points by the opponent). Between-play (or between-point) plans can be devised for interactive sports with breaks in the action, such as tennis and American football.

Backup mental performance plans emphasize overcoming specific problems that regularly arise, or adjusting goals to get the most out of practice or competition in the face of trouble. Problems in practice might include sluggishness due to lack of sleep, a lack of focus, or a coach's bad mood. Problems in competition might include a large early deficit, an unruly crowd, or fallout from a key mistake. Backup mental performance plans help athletes forge ahead even when conditions are not optimal.

Mental Recovery Plans

Backup mental performance plans address recurring or predictable problems; **mental recovery plans** help you recover from unexpected or uncommon setbacks where you become emotionally flustered and get

taken out of your game. Mental recovery plans don't necessarily allow performers to completely return to form, but they do help them make the best of difficult situations and perform as well as circumstances allow. A mental recovery plan is a simple routine designed for the wide range of unexpected practice and competitive situations that occasionally catch competitors off guard and cause them to lose composure (e.g., distracting nonsport problems, controversial officiating decisions, trash talking by opponents, or stupid mistakes of their own). Mental recovery plans are general in design to provide a standard coping routine that can be used regardless of the problem that caused the loss of composure.

Role of Triggers, Releases, and Cue Words

An important component of any mental plan is the behavior or word designed to initiate the routine. For mental plans to be effective, they must be practiced until they are automatic, and shorthand methods are needed to focus attention and initiate action without prompting excessive analysis. This need is filled by triggers, releases, and cue words; in addition, triggers and releases provide a tangible way for coaches to see if athletes are following their routines.

Triggers

Athletes use a variety of triggers to initiate mental plans: A runner laces up her shoes to trigger her

mental preparation plan, a golfer pulls a club from his bag to trigger his preshot routine, and a basketball player slaps both palms on the floor to trigger a mental recovery plan. Volleyball players form a quick huddle and look each other in the eye to trigger their between-point routine, and a tennis player focuses on his racket strings between points to trigger greater concentration. You can help your athletes identify triggers to initiate their own mental plans.

Releases

Releases are specific behaviors used to shed the effects of bad plays, stupid mistakes, missed assignments, poor decisions, and bad calls that create negative thoughts, frustration, and anxiety. A basketball player can walk away and count to 10 after a bad call. An infielder can pick up a handful of dirt and throw it down after making an error. A volleyball team can huddle after a bad point and chant “out of here” to exorcise their competitive demons. Our favorite release comes from colleague Ken Ravizza, who takes a plastic toilet into the dugout and has players flush their bad plays, poor at-bats, errors, and negative thoughts away to put these problems behind them. Coaches must help their athletes develop effective releases in order for mental plans to work.

Cue Words

Cue words remind athletes of process concerns that enhance performance while helping eliminate the distracting, confidence-deflating effects of negative thoughts. However, personal experience has shown that using cue words sometimes causes athletes to overanalyze, which can interfere with their ability to get into flow. Thus, we recommend using cue words that emphasize feel and trust to promote automatic skill execution. For example, during practice, a golfer may want to use cue words to remind herself to maintain a structured preshot routine (e.g., “one step at a time”) or a swing cue (e.g., “smooth”) when she hits a long iron shot. Cue words can be automated through extensive practice, so that during competition athletes can use them minimally and execute automatically based on trust and feel. Diver Greg Louganis used cue words such as “see the water, see the water, see the water, push out” to spot his dives, whereas NBA great Larry Bird focused on the cue words “nothing but net” when shooting free throws. See table 13.1 for cue words that can be used in a race plan.

TABLE 13.1

Cue Words for a 100-Meter Dash

Stage of race	Cue words
Prestart	Ready, alert, energized
Start	Explode, drive, react, go
First 10 strides	Low, power, accelerate, boom
Middle	Pump, kick, cruise, smooth
Finish	Lunge, push hard, go for it

Developing Mental Plans

How do you help your athletes develop mental plans? It’s not as hard as it might seem. Although we strongly recommend that your athletes develop mental preparation, performance, and recovery plans, they don’t have to be done all at once. Although starting with a preparation plan helps athletes develop a flow mind-set, we often start with a plan that makes a more immediate impact, such as a between-performance plan in team sports or a **race plan** or preperformance routine in individual sports. However, the decision is yours, because you must consider your athletes’ current capabilities and needs. Regardless of which plan you teach first, we believe the investment in developing mental plans will pay huge dividends. You’ll develop mentally tough athletes who will rise to the occasion in competitions and develop their capabilities fully. Let’s look at specific steps for developing each type of plan.

Mental Preparation Plans

Mental preparation plans provide a blueprint for athletes’ mental warm-up to maximize their chances of creating a flow mind-set and practicing and competing at their best. Athletes need to develop a mental warm-up routine that can be performed each day in practice and, with minor adjustments, before competition. Mental preparation plans must be highly individualized to meet each athlete’s specific needs, but most include two basic steps: using mental training tools to develop mental preparation skills and strategies, and combining physical and mental warm-ups.

Using Mental Training Tools to Develop Mental Preparation Plans

The goal of mental preparation plans is to help athletes create a flow mind-set that solidifies their

confidence; eliminates distractions and negative thoughts; concentrates on realistic process goals; controls arousal so they feel relaxed, energized, and in control; enhances motivation to push their limits; and helps them remain positive, poised, and optimistic in the face of failure and adversity. Athletes can use each mental training tool as needed to develop the mental skills that enable a flow mind-set.

Goal setting—Goal setting is an important component of any mental preparation plan. In the sample plan shown in figure 13.2, 400-meter runner Kim focuses on her goals and race plan during five steps in her mental preparation plan. During her jog and static stretching, she focuses on her goals and goes over her race plan. Later, during race simulation, she focuses on her overall goal and the subgoals to make it happen. Finally, during the last 20 minutes before the race, Kim focuses on her goal time, race plan, and splits to enhance her focus and readiness and to help her remain process oriented. Goal setting should be used in mental preparation plans to maintain task focus rather than self-focus and to motivate athletes to strive for excellence.

Imagery—Using imagery helps athletes boost confidence, program goals, and create a feeling that will help them perform optimally. Kim uses imagery early, during the jog and static stretching portions of her warm-up, to get the feeling of running with perfect form and enhance readiness by focusing on quick clips of key portions of her race. She also uses imagery during race simulation to imagine competitors beside her, and again during isolation to review her overall race plan and focus on key parts of the race. Imagery is a versatile tool that athletes use at various points in mental preparation plans to play out possible competitive scenarios, re-create positive performance feelings, practice strategy recognition, imagine achieving goals by following specific action plans, boost confidence, and try out possible strategies.

Relaxation and energization—Most athletes use relaxation and energization in a variety of ways in constructing and implementing their mental preparation plans. Kim uses relaxation in 7 of her 11 steps. She relaxes to control anxiety during initial race check-in. During static stretching she uses relaxation to enhance her flexibility and continue to control anxiety, and while running drills and strides she works to maintain relaxation, particularly in her jaw and arms. Next, during her bathroom break and race check-in, Kim uses relaxation to deal with pre-race jitters, then, as she isolates herself from other

competitors, she uses relaxation as needed to calm her nerves. Finally, she focuses on staying relaxed as she drives out of the blocks during race-start practice. Athletes should use relaxation in their mental preparation plans as often as necessary to get and stay relaxed and control anxiety.

Normally, athletes have more need to relax than energize before competition because of the natural arousing effects of performing. Kim focuses on energization during five steps of her mental preparation routine. First, during dynamic stretching, she aims to feel strong and powerful, then, during strides, she increases arousal to enhance her motivation. During race simulation she tries to feel the energy of the crowd, whereas during isolation she feels electricity running through her body to signal readiness. Finally, as she conducts start preparation, Kim wants to feel explosive as she drives out of the blocks. Thus, she uses energization skills during those steps of her plan where she needs to feel strong and vigorous.

Self-talk—Self-talk is a critical part of mental preparation plans; it helps athletes become and remain positive, focused, confident, motivated, and poised. Kim uses self-talk in five steps of her mental preparation plan, starting with her jog and static stretching, where she listens to her self-talk script and repeats positive affirmations. During strides, she focuses again on maintaining a positive mental attitude, and during race check-in and isolation she focuses on staying positive and uses cue words such as “quick feet,” “fast turnover,” and “maintain form when I’m hurting.” Self-talk also helps athletes manage stress and get motivated to push their limits.

Putting it all together—Your athletes can use the questions in figure 13.3 on page 214 to begin designing their mental preparation plans. These questions help athletes identify the mental training tools that will be most beneficial for them and decide how to use those tools in their mental preparation plans. They can then figure out how to combine their mental and physical warm-ups.

Combine Mental and Physical Warm-Up

In developing mental preparation plans, the length and sequencing of steps is critical. The plan must fit into the time available for warm-up, and the sequencing must feel comfortable and mesh with the athlete’s physical warm-up routine. For most athletes, the physical warm-up is more systematic than the mental one. To combine the two, have athletes first write out their physical warm-up routine in

Mental Preparation Plan for a 400-Meter Runner

Step 1. Initial Race Check-In (80 minutes before competition, for 5 minutes)

- Pick up number, check spike length, and get lane assignment.
- Find heat number and check competitors in the race.
- Control anxiety level using deep breathing and cue word.
- Find a shady spot to put stuff and stretch.

Step 2. Jog (75 minutes before competition, for 8 minutes)

- Nice and easy to start the blood pumping.
- Go over race plan from assigned lane, imagining competitors in their lanes.
- Image running with perfect form; particularly focus on the feelings.
- Go over backup plans and how you want to use them.
- Listen to self-talk script to focus only on positive thoughts.

Step 3. Static Stretching (67 minutes before competition, for 15 minutes)

- Breathe into each stretch, focusing on getting muscles really loose.
- Control anxiety and focus on race plan.
- Be confident and use positive self-talk as I do quick imagery clips of key portions of my race.

Step 4. Dynamic Stretching (52 minutes before competition, for 7 minutes)

- Create feeling of strength and power in muscles.
- Stay tall, drive legs, and use good form with "pawing" action.

Step 5. Drills (45 minutes before competition, for 10 minutes)

- Feel light and powerful with a strong push-off.
- Look stylish with proper technique.
- Toe up, heel up, knee drive, hips up, and stay tall.
- Shoulders down, relaxed arm swing, relaxed jaw.

Step 6. Strides (35 minutes before competition, for 10 minutes)

- Accelerate and drive off the ground with a quick first step.
- Push, push, push while staying low.
- Transition into driving taller while remaining relaxed.
- Feel fast, confident, and totally positive.
- Keep PMA (positive mental attitude) high, increase arousal while developing strong motivation—get psyched.

Step 7. Race Simulation (25 minutes before competition, for 5 minutes)

- 120 meters simulating the first part of the race and the corner.
- Imagine competitors beside me as I feed off the energy from the crowd and my competitors.
- Focus on my personal goal and the subgoals that will make it happen.

(continued)

FIGURE 13.2 Encourage your athletes to design personal mental preparation plans that will help them get into a flow mind-set.

Step 8. Bathroom Break (20 minutes before competition, for 3 minutes)

Better safe than sorry.

Use rapid relaxation to deal with race jitters.

Step 9. Check-In (17 minutes before competition, for 2 minutes)

Place my number on my hip.

Stay positive and confident.

Don't let other competitors sidetrack me—stay focused on my race plan.

Step 10. Isolation (15 minutes before competition, for 10 minutes)

Lie down in the shade away from others.

I'm now physically ready to race and in a good flow mind-set.

If needed, do rapid relaxation to stay relaxed.

Feel the electricity running through my body as a sign of readiness.

Go over my overall race plan and key parts again in my mind.

Vividly see running my goal time by hitting each split on the button.

Think of positive cue words: "quick feet," "fast turnover," "maintain form when I'm hurting."

Be in the zone to run my own race—I'm totally prepared and ready.

Now compete.

Step 11. Start Preparation (5 minutes before competition, for 5 minutes)

Set up the blocks and do three starts.

Feel explosive and drive off the blocks.

Get out of warm-ups.

Stay relaxed but drive the ground.

"Be hungry" and "feel fast."

Think only of the gun and react.

FIGURE 13.2 (continued)

the proper sequence, noting how long each part takes (see figure 13.4) and how long before practice or competition they normally start their physical warm-up. Next, they should write out their mental warm-up, first listing the mental training tools they will use to create a flow mind-set, then sequencing them in a routine that will be stable and easy to follow. Athletes must also estimate how long each step will take in order to determine when to start their preparation routine for practice or competition. Athletes who become highly aroused while doing precompetition imagery, for example, may schedule it for several hours before the actual competition and use short imagery bouts as needed later in their preparation plan so that they benefit from the imagery but also maintain their desired level of composure.

Finally, athletes should integrate their mental and physical warm-ups into a combined routine by finding ways to perform mental warm-up activities while conducting physical warm-up drills. For example, a sprinter might combine sprints with energization and motivation work, or relax her muscles and do final imagery as she stretches. Even then, combined preparation plans take considerably longer than physical warm-up routines, so athletes must design their routines to fit into the available time. (Depending on the time constraints of the sport, combined preparation routines take anywhere from 20 minutes to several hours.) And you must make sure your team arrives at the competitive venue in time for an adequate warm-up. It's also a good idea to develop a streamlined backup preparation plan for use when travel problems or other issues prevent athletes from

Strategies for Developing Mental Preparation Plans

1. How will you get focused for practice or competition?

- a. What are your goals for this practice or competition? What do you want to accomplish or focus on?
- b. Do you have a focus cue word or phrase for this event?
- c. What type of imagery would help you focus better?

2. How will you develop a positive mental attitude for practice or competition?

- a. How will you keep your goals challenging but realistic?
- b. Does playing your self-talk script create a strong positive mental attitude (PMA)?
- c. Do you have a PMA cue word or phrase?
- d. What type of imagery might create a more PMA?

3. How will you develop an optimal level of self-confidence for practice or competition?

- a. How will you use your goals to develop optimal self-confidence?
- b. Does playing your self-talk script create optimal confidence?
- c. Do you have a self-confidence cue word or phrase?
- d. What type of imagery helps you create an optimal level of confidence?

4. How will you develop optimal arousal for practice or competition?

- a. How will you use your relaxation and energization skills to create optimal arousal?
- b. How will you use your goals to enhance your optimal energy level?
- c. How helpful is your self-talk script in creating optimal arousal?
- d. Do you have an optimal energy cue word or phrase?
- e. What type of imagery helps you achieve optimal arousal?

5. How will you develop motivation to push your limits for practice or competition?

- a. How will you use your goals to enhance your motivation?
- b. How helpful is your self-talk script in enhancing your motivation?
- c. Do you have a motivation cue word or phrase?
- d. What type of imagery helps you achieve optimal motivation?

6. How will you combine this mental warm-up with your physical warm-up?

FIGURE 13.3 Athletes should ask themselves these six questions as they design their mental preparation plans.

Physical and Mental Preparation Plan Development Form

Identify the sequence of your physical and mental warm-ups, looking for ways to combine physical and mental warm-up activities. Write out each step, noting steps that include both physical and mental warm-up activities. Make sure that your routine allows you to warm up completely, both mentally and physically. Make sure your mental warm-up helps develop high levels of focus and concentration, self-confidence, positive mental attitude, and motivation and gets your arousal to the optimal energy zone.

Crucial Steps in Physical Warm-up Routine	Time Required	Concerns	Crucial Steps in Mental Warm-up Routine	Time Required	Concerns	Combined Physical & Mental Warm-up
1.						
2.						
3.						
4.						
5.						
6.						
7.						
8.						

From D. Burton and T. Raedeke, 2008, *Sport Psychology for Coaches* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics).

FIGURE 13.4 Athletes can use the Physical and Mental Preparation Plan Development Form to ensure that their preperformance warm-up routine addresses all aspects of performance readiness and helps create a flow mind-set.

Hank Aaron's Mental Preparation and Performance Plans

Baseball great Hank Aaron believes that the secret to his success as a hitter was a disciplined mental routine that gave him an edge over other major league hitters (Hanson 1992). Aaron used a combination of mental preparation and performance plans. He would arrive at the ball park early each day so he could spend several hours preparing mentally for the game, primarily visualizing himself facing the pitchers he might hit against that day in a variety of situations. Aaron's internal imagery helped him feel in tune with how the ball was likely to come at him, enhancing his pitch recognition skills and the automaticity of his swing. During the game, he continued his visualization and studied the pitcher, even watching the pitcher's release point through an eyelet of his cap if he was struggling to see the ball. At bat, after anticipating what the next pitch was likely to be, he simply watched the ball and tried to use a relaxed swing to put the ball in play. Aaron credits his mental routines for helping him become a career .305 hitter, baseball's longtime career home run leader (755), and an amazingly consistent performer in the field, on the base paths, and at the plate.

implementing their normal plan. Note that the 400-meter runner's integrated preparation plan begins 80 minutes before competition and ends when she sets up in her blocks and clears her mind so she can react to the gun. Mental preparation plans are very effective for team sports as well (as illustrated above in Hank Aaron's Mental Preparation and Performance Plans).

Mental Performance Plans

These plans provide a blueprint for remaining in a flow mind-set throughout practice and competition. Standard mental performance plans proactively enhance performance when things go according to plan, whereas backup mental performance plans cover common contingencies that can reduce performance quality. Standard mental performance plans form the foundation of athletes' mental approach to practicing and competing. They focus on athletes' goals for practices or competitions that go as expected and provide specific action plans for maintaining a flow mind-set. They also include periodic checks (at specific times during a race or during scheduled breaks in team sports) on athletes' mind-set so that mental skills can be adjusted if needed to maintain a flow feeling. If problems consistently arise, review the related mental skills with your athletes to identify whether an adjustment is needed. Athletes should know which mental skills are most beneficial personally and be sure to use them.

As helpful as standard mental performance plans can be, backup plans are often the key to success, because they prepare athletes to handle problems that arise frequently. Due to time constraints, most athletes and teams will be able to create only two or three backup plans. But because they deal with spe-

cific anticipatable problems and are rehearsed extensively, they greatly enhance the chance of success. An example: Julie was the only dependable scorer on our basketball team, and opponents knew that if they shut her down they would probably win. One favorite tactic was to rough her up physically, which sparked her temper and took her out of her game. I helped Julie develop a backup plan to handle the problem. We changed her mind-set to view these tactics as a form of flattery and emphasized that if our team was to win, she had to score in spite of them. We focused on using her speed to outmaneuver opponents, run them through numerous screens, and create good shots for her. These points were the focus of her imagery, her self-talk script, and her goals. The strategy worked, and Julie's scoring average went up three points per game during the conference season.

In this section, we look briefly at the basics for developing each of the three types of mental performance plans: races and routines, self-paced tasks, and interactive sports.

Races and Routines

Races involve a competitive task of somewhat fixed difficulty—the task doesn't change a lot from race to race. Uncontrollable factors such as weather conditions and quality of the race field may affect performance, but athletes can develop a systematic race plan to employ with minimal modification each time they race. Step one is to chunk the race into three to seven meaningful parts (e.g., start, first 400 meters, middle 700, and last 400), then develop goals and action plans for each segment. During the first 400 meters, a runner's main goal may be to "relax and hang back at

a 64-second pace." Athletes should choose cue words that trigger the correct feeling and focus for each race segment. Possible cue words for the start include "explode and push" to get out fast, or "control and pace" to stay within oneself. For the finish, possible cue words include "relax and maintain form" to avoid tightening up, or "reel them in" to catch the runner ahead. Performance plans for gymnastics and figure skating routines can be set up in similar fashion.

Backup plans deal with adverse weather conditions, strategy problems (e.g., going out too fast or slow), and race performance concerns (e.g., feeling lethargic, worried about a rival competitor, or concerned about performance). For each problem situation, have athletes identify what cues they will use to implement their backup plan, how they will resegment the race if their original plan becomes ineffective, and how they can reestablish the desired feeling for the remainder of the race. Use figure 13.5 on page 218 to help athletes develop their race plans.

Self-Paced Tasks

Self-paced tasks are sports, or isolated tasks within sports, in which athletes perform at their own pace. They usually require repetitions of the same or similar movement patterns. Self-paced tasks are common in accuracy sports (e.g., bowling, billiards, golf, archery, and shooting) and in accuracy tasks in interactive sports (e.g., shooting free throws, kicking field goals, or serving in tennis or volleyball). Other examples include diving, ski jumping, and most throwing and jumping events in track and field. The two major ingredients of any mental performance plan for self-paced sports or tasks are a preperformance routine and a systematic between-performance routine. Preperformance routines create and maintain a flow mind-set that helps athletes trust their bodies and execute with greater automaticity. (See Tom Amberry's Preshot Routine for Free Throws below for information on the preshot routine that helped him make 2,750 straight free throws.)

Tom Amberry's Preshot Routine for Free Throws

Tom Amberry is a retired podiatrist who started going to the gym for exercise. By pure chance, he became interested in free throw shooting and started shooting 500 per day. Within several months, he had become proficient enough to attempt to set the world record for consecutive free throws made, and, at age 73, he did just that, hitting an astounding 2,750 in a row. In truth, he never even missed. He had started at 9 a.m. and was still shooting after 10 p.m. but had to quit because the gym owner wanted to lock up. Amberry says his secret to success is his seven-step preshot routine, and it is a good model for athletes who want to develop their own preperformance routines (Amberry & Reed 1996).

Step 1: Feet square to the line.

Before stepping to the line, do several deep knee bends, clench your fists for 3 to 5 seconds, and shake them out to relax your hands and arms.

Step 2: Bounce the ball three times with the inflation hole up.

The inflation hole is your focus or concentration cue, so stare at it as you bounce the ball deliberately.

Step 3: Put your thumb in the channel, with your third finger pointing at the inflation hole.

Take a deep breath to relax and get rid of the butterflies.
Mental imagery should focus on how perfect your shot looks and feels.

Step 4: Elbow in the shot pocket.

Step 5: Bend your knees.

Step 6: Eyes on the target.

Repeat cue words "nothing but net."

Step 7: Shoot and follow through completely, with your "hand in the cookie jar."

Race Plan Development Form

Race Segment	RACE SEGMENT GOALS			Cue Words
	Physical		Mental	
Example: Race start	React quickly, stay low and drive hard; be with the leaders out of the blocks		Focus only on the gun; keep it positive; be confident in your start	"Be explosive," "drive low and hard," "I always get great starts"
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				

From D. Burton and T. Reedeke, 2008, *Sport Psychology for Coaches* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics).

FIGURE 13.5 Plotting physical and mental goals and cues for each segment of the race and creating backup plans for overcoming potential difficulties helps athletes automate their execution and achieve a flow mind-set.

Preperformance Routine Development Form

Identify the steps in your current preperformance routine and any concerns about those steps. Next look at the required steps for preperformance routines. Make any additions of required steps to your current routine. Finally, write out your final preperformance routine that includes all personal and required steps. Write out each step in your Final Routine in as much detail as possible. Make sure that your new Preperformance Routine works for you and is short enough to fit within the time constraints of your sport.

Steps in Current Preperformance Routine	Concerns	Required Steps for Preperformance Routines	Additions of Required Steps to Routine	Final Routine: Combined Current and Ideal Steps
1.		Step 1: Relax and remove unwanted tension from performing muscles.		
2.		Step 2: Use goals and self-talk to promote focus and concentration.		
3.		Step 3: Adjust arousal to ensure you're in your optimal energy zone.		
4.		Step 4: Use imagery and positive self-talk to become optimally confident in performing your best.		
5.		Step 5: Develop a positive mental attitude that is stress-free but challenged.		
6.		Step 6: How will you maximize a highly automated, feeling-oriented performance?		
7.		Step 7: Streamline your routine to make it quick, effective and consistent to execute.		
8.				

From D. Burton and T. Reedeke, 2008, *Sport Psychology for Coaches* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics).

FIGURE 13.6 Athletes can use the Preperformance Routine Development Form to analyze and refine their existing routine.

Use the Preperformance Routine Development Form (figure 13.6 on page 219) to guide your athletes in developing their own routine (which should not be dramatically longer than their current one). Have them try the routine on their own a few times to make sure that they like its flow and that it creates the feeling state and automaticity they're looking for. Remember that feel and automaticity come with practice, so it takes time to finalize preperformance routines.

As with mental preparation plans, athletes in self-paced tasks or sports will want to create backup mental performance plans. If competition is delayed, weather interferes, or the athlete loses focus, what will he or she do? Athletes should identify what cue they'll use to start their backup plan, how they will develop new goals and action plans based on the situation, and how they will regain a flow mind-set or positive outlook for the rest of the competition.

Athletes performing self-paced tasks or sports often need to develop a between-performance routine, as well. What should golfers or shot-putters do with the time between shots or throws? How can place-kickers or pitchers best use the time between kicks or pitches? We recommend structuring this time with a consistent between-performance routine to maintain a flow mind-set that ensures athletes are relaxed, focused, and confident. Moreover, maintaining intense concentration throughout a three-hour baseball game or four-hour round of golf is virtually impossible. Performers need to learn to turn concentration on and off (e.g., a pitcher turns his concentration on when he toes the rubber, and stepping off is his cue to relax). Between-performance routines feature three main components:

1. *React.* Using relaxation and self-talk skills, develop a composed **reaction** to the previous performance—good or bad—in order to stay on an even keel.
2. *Reflect.* Quickly reflect on and learn from the previous performance, but do not dwell on poor performance. Use a cue to end reflection and move on to **readying** (e.g., putting a golf club back in the bag, or turning to face the net in tennis or volleyball).
3. *Refocus and ready.* The cue to end reflection triggers athletes to repeat their preperformance routine to help them refocus on the task at hand and get ready to perform automatically.

Interactive Sports

Interactive sports vary in difficulty, even during one event, because the nature of the task changes

according to the caliber of the opponent and the type and effectiveness of offensive and defensive strategies that each athlete or team employs. Most team sports are interactive, as are such individual sports as tennis, wrestling, boxing, and martial arts. Because interactive sports are fast-paced and only somewhat predictable, mental performance plans for them focus on responding systematically to anticipatable critical situations or events (during practice or competition) and reacting to specific good or bad performance trends.

The first step is to have your athletes identify four to eight important situations that occur during practice or competition. They can start by using a plan development form (figure 13.7) to select two to four critical times during practice (e.g., scrimmage situations, one-on-one drills, or two-minute offense) and competition (e.g., beginning or end of a quarter, half, or period; or first action after a timeout). They should also select two to four good or bad performance events, both during practice (e.g., poor early performance, losing a one-on-one drill, or making critical mistakes) and competition (e.g., a run of points by the opposing team, being confronted by a press, or a turnover). Next, develop goals and action plans for each situation. In the first two minutes of a half, a team might emphasize defense to take advantage of high arousal levels. During one-on-one drills, a player might focus on using good technique and exploiting the opponent's weaknesses. Teach athletes to check and adjust their flow mind-set as needed. If they normally experience high stress in the first minute, they should focus on relaxing and having fun. They can use cue words to trigger automated responses. (See figure 13.8 on page 222 for a sample plan for basketball.)

Numerous situations in interactive sports require backup plans: bad calls, rowdy fans, turnovers and other mistakes, an angry coach, a run of points by the opponent. Have your athletes develop backup plans for two to four major problems that have been the hardest for them to handle. Athletes in interactive sports (e.g., volleyball, tennis, and American football) that have breaks in the action will also benefit from between-play routines. The basic "react" principles remain similar for interactive sports, but "reflect" is constrained by time limits, and "refocus" cues become more concrete, such as stepping into the football huddle or facing the volleyball or tennis net. "Readying" still triggers pre-serve routines in tennis and volleyball and presnap routines in football. (See Ready, Respond, Refocus on page 223 for a sample between-play routine in a team sport.)

Interactive Sport Performance Plan Development Form

Predetermined Critical Situations	SITUATION GOALS		Cue Words
	Physical	Mental	
Example: First 3 minutes of the game	Emphasize defense and rebounding to take advantage of high arousal level.	Focus on being relaxed but aggressive; try to intimidate opponent physically; keep things simple until in flow of the game.	"Be quick but don't hurry," "be aggressive but in control," "let the game come to you," "be unselfish and put the team first."
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
Reactions to Good and Bad Performance Trends	SITUATION GOALS		Cue Words
	Physical	Mental	
Example: Opponent reels off 10 straight points	Play under control to reduce turnovers; be more patient to get better shots; increase defensive intensity; put more pressure on opponent's guards.	Focus on increasing energization and motivation; restore confidence and PMA; focus on more physical defense and more patience on offense.	"Poise and composure under pressure," "make the extra pass to get a good shot," "pressure them into hurrying," "ball pressure and shoot down the passing lanes."
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			

From D. Burton and T. Raedeke, 2008, *Sport Psychology for Coaches* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics).

FIGURE 13.7 Athletes can use the Interactive Sport Performance Plan Development Form to set specific goals and cue words for critical situations.

Sample Interactive Sport Performance Plan for Basketball

Predetermined Critical Situations	SITUATION GOALS		Cue Words
	Physical	Mental	
Critical Situation 1: first 3 minutes of the half or game	Emphasize defense and rebounding to take advantage of high arousal level.	Focus on being relaxed but aggressive; try to intimidate opponent physically; keep things simple until in flow of the game.	"Be quick but don't hurry," "be aggressive but in control," "let the game come to you," "be unselfish and put the team first."
Critical Situation 2: last 3 minutes of the half or game	Emphasize getting a spurt before half; turn up the aggressiveness on defense; look for every fast break opportunity; emphasize high percentage shots in half court; good time for pressure.	Approach this period confidently and aggressively; maintain a high PMA; focus on pushing the pace without becoming careless; raise arousal level and motivation to push limits	"Turn up the pressure," "look for every opportunity to run," "only want high percentage shots," "jump on them before half," "act confident and aggressive."
Critical Situation 3: after a time-out we call	Emphasize getting a stop or score on the next possession; turn up the intensity; adjust either offense or defense to create a positive mismatch; increase aggressiveness	Regain confidence; enhance PMA; focus on one possession at a time and how to exploit our strengths or minimize our weaknesses; raise arousal and motivation to create a burst.	"Critical time for a stop or score," "turn it up," "be positive and find the mismatch," "play to our strengths," "jump on them."
Reactions to Good and Bad Performance Trends	SITUATION GOALS		Cue Words
	Physical	Mental	
Performance Reaction 1: opponent reels off 10 straight points	Play under control to reduce turnovers; be more patient to get better shots on offense; increase defensive intensity and put more pressure on guards to keep them from getting into their offense.	Focus on increasing energization and motivation; restore confidence and PMA; focus on more physical defense and more patient offense.	"Poise and composure under pressure," "make the extra pass to get a good shot," "pressure them into hurrying," "ball pressure and shut down the passing lanes."
Performance Reaction 2: make lots of turnovers against the press	Understand where defense is vulnerable; play under control and understand multiple options on where to pass; once break pressure, look to score.	Focus on relaxation and positive self talk to regain confidence and combat negative thoughts; stay under control; be aggressive when pressure broken.	"Poise and composure under pressure," "be quick but don't hurry," "always an outlet pass," "once press broken, look to score."
Performance Reaction 3: officials' calls consistently going against us	Recognize that the aggressive player/team usually gets the calls; be more aggressive; concentrate on moving feet rather than reaching; penetrate and pass rather than try to score.	Focus on energizing and raising motivation; regain confidence & PMA; counter negative thoughts, emphasize that we can't control officials' decisions; play our game and don't worry about officials.	"Champions keep their composure in the face of adversity," "don't worry about things we can't control," "aggressive teams make their own breaks and calls," "just do your best."

From D. Burton and T. Raedeke, 2008, *Sport Psychology for Coaches* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics).

FIGURE 13.8 A basketball player's completed form might look like this.

Ready, Respond, Refocus: Nebraska Football's Between-Play Routine

In the early nineties, Nebraska football coach Tom Osborne and sport psychology consultant Ken Ravizza developed a between-play routine to help players take one play at a time by remaining relaxed, focused, and confident in order to maximize execution (Ravizza & Osborne 1991). Nebraska's mental training program was built on two basic concepts: taking personal responsibility and maintaining self-control. Because a missed assignment by just one player can lead to a blown play, the program was designed to develop consistency in mental and physical preparation.

Nebraska's between-performance routine centered on the three Rs—ready, respond, and refocus—to maximize concentration on one play at a time. In step one, “ready” is the verbal cue given by the signal caller (quarterback or linebacker) to focus attention totally on his directions and on the next play. Players must put the last play behind them and focus on what they have to do next. As the play is called, offensive players have two responsibilities: reviewing their assignment and repeating the snap count to themselves. As players break the huddle, they must recognize what their opponent is doing tactically by reading their cues and communicating adjustments to their teammates. As soon as players finish checks or audible calls, they shift to automatic pilot and focus on “just reacting.”

Step 2 (respond) is the athletes' execution at the snap of the ball. They must respond automatically as they've learned through thousands of hours of practice. Trust is encouraged during portions of practice when players are given little feedback from coaches in order to teach them to react instinctively. The importance of performing on automatic pilot is reinforced in meetings, on the field, and during film sessions.

Step 3 (refocus) is where players review the completed play, then put it behind them and refocus their attention on the next play as soon as possible. The time between the end of the play and the next team huddle gives athletes time to reflect, identify anything learned, and decide on any adjustments to make for upcoming plays. This is also the time for the players to put the previous play behind them, particularly if a mistake was made, so they can focus on the next play. Players should acknowledge their feelings (e.g., celebrate a good play or allow momentary anger over a bad one), then move on.

Mental Recovery Plans

Coaches and athletes can't anticipate all problems, and mental recovery plans provide a general coping strategy to help athletes recover from unanticipated problems, particularly when their goals become unattainable or they lose their composure. A mental recovery plan is a single, all-purpose solution with a set procedure for getting back on track after disaster and salvaging as much benefit from the practice or competition as possible (see *Mental Recovery in Basketball* on page 224). Although recovery plans occasionally allow competitors to completely return to form, they usually just provide a means of damage control and help athletes take something positive away from a negative event. How complete a recovery an athlete makes depends on how quickly he or she identifies the need to use the mental recovery plan and how effectively it is

then implemented. We recommend incorporating the following five steps:

1. Develop a physical trigger to start the recovery plan.
2. Relax and adjust arousal level.
3. Revise goals so they are realistic for the current situation.
4. Use affirmations and counterarguments to reduce stress, increase positive mental attitude, and boost confidence.
5. Imagine regaining a positive mind-set and attaining the revised goals.

A recovery plan can work only if athletes know when to implement it. Ken Ravizza uses a mental trigger in which athletes imagine a stoplight. A green light indicates that athletes have attained a flow

Case Study: Mental Recovery in Basketball

The opposing team has just exploded for 12 straight points, 8 of them by the player Rob is guarding. Rob looks panicked and reports that he can't stop his man. His confidence is gone, and he's focusing on what a rotten defender he is. Rob had used his size advantage to score 10 points earlier in the game, but now he's too flustered to take advantage of the mismatch. Rob and his teammates have lost their composure and been taken completely out of their game. You call a time-out and remind them to use their mental recovery plans. Rob has automated a good plan using these five steps:

1. Rob cues his mental recovery plan by slapping the floor with both hands.
2. He uses rapid relaxation (combining deep breaths with his cue phrase "chill out") to lower his arousal to a better level.
3. Rob then revises his goals so they are realistic given the current situation. His offensive goal is to take advantage of the size mismatch down on the block. On defense, he wants to beat his opponent to his favorite shooting spots and overplay him to force him left, while being more physical in fighting through screens off the ball.
4. Rob counters his negative thoughts by reminding himself, "I am a good player who just isn't playing well at the moment." He emphasizes that if he plays harder and smarter, as he did in the first half, he can hold his opponent in check and start scoring again. He reminds himself that no matter how the game comes out, he wants to play well and try to get back into it.
5. Rob uses quick imagery of how he wants to play and of regaining the flow mind-set that will allow him to reach his revised goals. He flashes quickly on images of himself posting up his opponent, holding him in check, and helping teammates who get beat. He imagines getting that smooth, fluid feeling on his jump shot and hitting three or four in a row.

Rob and his teammates do recover. After the time-out, they start playing better and outscore their opponents the rest of the way. They do not make up the 14-point deficit, but they play well during the last 7 minutes of the game and lose by only 8 points. Despite their disappointment about losing composure, Rob and his teammates are excited that their recovery plans worked and are ready to continue developing them.

mind-set, a yellow light indicates potential problems, and a red light indicates the need to use a recovery plan. You and your athletes can adopt that approach or create your own.

Developing Athletes' Mental Toughness Skills

Mental toughness means performing one's best under any circumstances, and developing mental toughness skills is critical to your athletes' competitive success. The key is to help your athletes create, automate, and implement a structured series

of mental plans aimed at attaining, maintaining, and regaining a flow mind-set. As with any other mental training tools or skills, developing mental toughness through the use of mental plans involves the three phases: education, acquisition, and implementation.

Education Phase

This phase has two objectives: provide a general education about mental toughness and mental plans, and encourage personal education so that your athletes become aware of their own strengths and weaknesses in using mental plans. You can usually do this in one or two team meetings. First,

educate them about mental plans and their benefits in practice and competitive performance. Describe the three major types (preparation, performance, and recovery), along with strategies for using each. Sell the importance of mental plans by citing times when your athletes could have benefited from using them, and give examples of athletes who have used them well. We recommend concluding this initial session by helping your athletes start the process of developing their first mental plan. We suggest that a between-performance routine is a good starting place for team sports because it benefits performance and is a collective routine that should boost team cohesion. For individual sports, we recommend starting with a race plan or preperformance routine.

Your athletes should develop a good understanding of what helps them achieve their own flow mind-set and how they already use routines to enhance performance. We recommend that athletes heighten their self-awareness by systematically logging key information about their flow mind-set and subsequent performance as described in chapter 14. Athletes with this kind of self-understanding will be better able to create effective, individualized mental plans.

Acquisition Phase

Mental plans can be time-intensive to develop and implement, and they can seem overwhelming for coaches who have only limited time for mental training. If you feel you do not have time to develop all three types of plans, start by developing one, perhaps a pre- or between-performance plan. If your athletes find that this plan works, it will be easier to add other plans in the future. Thus it is often best to implement mental plans using a phased approach grounded in four basic strategies:

1. Identify the mental plan that would be most valuable for athletes to develop first.
2. Develop that plan using the guidelines discussed in this chapter.
3. Assess how well the plan works and revise it until it works optimally.
4. Practice systematically until the plan is highly automated.

Implementing mental plans is a trial-and-error process. Have your athletes try out plans and evaluate their effectiveness, modifying them as necessary

until they have one they like. First, they should test their plans using imagery, attending to each plan's rhythm and flow, its length, and the degree to which they feel it will do what it is designed to do. If any aspect of a mental plan feels uncomfortable, revise it freely. Second, have athletes try their mental plans in practice and continue to record data in their mental training log. They should note whether their plan helps them prepare mentally and whether their performance meets the plan's goal, then modify the plan in any problem areas. The more comfortable athletes become with their plans, the better the plans will work, creating the physical feeling and positive mind-set that maximize performance.

Implementation Phase

In this phase, you help your athletes automate their mental skills, and they'll get best initial results from simulation. Unless mental skills are highly automated, most competitors suffer Launi Meili's fate at the Seoul Olympics: Their mental skills break down in important, pressure-packed competitions when they are needed most. Automating mental plans is the tedious part of learning, because it requires hundreds, even thousands, of repetitions of already-learned skills and strategies. Automation is laborious, but it is necessary to develop the mental blueprint of the skills to the point where athletes can execute them without thinking. In pressure-packed situations, performers experience so much stress that they cannot rely on thinking their way through their performance. Instead, they must react instinctively, relying on the execution of automatic responses with minimal conscious thought.

As with other mental training tools and skills, automating mental plans is most effective when practice simulates the conditions athletes will face in competition. When athletes practice using their mental training tools, skills, and plans in a distracting, pressure-packed environment, they are better able to fully automate those skills and transfer them to competition. We recommend using three types of simulation. First, have athletes practice using their mental plans during imagery (e.g., imagine using a race plan in an upcoming home meet). Second, use practice situations such as scrimmages to simulate competition as realistically as possible so athletes can use their mental plans in live action. Finally, treat early-season or less important competitions as opportunities to simulate major competitions where execution of mental plans is most critical.

SUMMARY

1. Mental toughness is the ability to play one's best in any situation, particularly in the face of problems, adversity, or failure. It is not a single mental skill but a constellation of mental training tools and skills promoting a flow mind-set. Mental plans seem to be the best strategy for incorporating and automating these skills in order to promote mental toughness.
2. Mental plans are systematic, individualized strategies designed to help athletes develop, maintain, and regain a flow mind-set so that they can remain mentally tough and play their best.
3. Mental plans have four major benefits: creating a flow mind-set, enhancing overall performance quality, increasing performance consistency, and dealing with adversity.
4. Athletes should develop three types of mental plans: mental preparation plans, mental performance plans, and mental recovery plans.
5. Mental preparation plans provide a blueprint for athletes' mental warm-up to help them create a flow mind-set. Athletes can develop standard and backup mental preparation plans.
6. Mental performance plans provide a road map for remaining in a flow mind-set throughout practice and competition in order to accomplish key goals. Standard and backup mental performance plans can be developed for races and routines, interactive sports, and self-paced tasks. Self-paced mental preparation plans also include preperformance and between-performance routines.
7. Mental recovery plans provide a generic solution for coping with unforeseen problems that cause athletes to lose their emotional composure. These are single, all-purpose plans that help athletes recover from severe problems, regain composure, and make the best of bad situations.
8. Developing athletes' mental toughness skills through mental plans helps them develop, automate, and implement a structured series of steps aimed at enhancing practice and competitive performance. As with other mental tools and skills, you can develop athletes' mental toughness in three phases: education, acquisition, and implementation.
9. During the education phase, coaches provide athletes with general knowledge about designing and implementing mental plans, and athletes develop an awareness of their strengths and weaknesses in developing a flow mind-set.
10. In the acquisition phase, you and your athletes decide which mental plan to create first, develop the plan, assess its effectiveness and revise as needed, and practice systematically until the plan is highly automated.
11. In the implementation phase, athletes automate their mental plans through overlearning and simulation.

KEY TERMS

automation	mental performance plans	race plan
backup mental performance plans	mental plans	reaction
between-performance routines	mental preparation plans	readying
flow mind-set	mental recovery plans	self-paced tasks
interactive sports	mental toughness	standard mental performance plan
	preperformance routines	

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is mental toughness, and how does it help athletes?
2. What are mental plans, and what is their role in mental training?
3. What are the benefits of mental plans?
4. What are the three major types of mental plans, and what is each designed to do?
5. How do triggers, releases, and cue words help athletes initiate mental plans?
6. How are mental plans developed?

PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES

1. Identify which type of standard mental performance plan is most appropriate for your primary sport (i.e., races and routines, self-paced tasks, or interactive sports) and determine the order in which you would develop plans for mental preparation, performance, and recovery.
2. Develop a first draft of your highest-priority plan.