

Game Preparation Techniques for Players

Dan Freigang

Editor's Note: The following is a lecture on the subject of preparing players for competition as presented to the NSCAA Academy staff at its midyear training session in San Antonio, Texas.

Every morning the gazelle wakes up on the African desert knowing it must be the fastest or it will fall prey to the lion. The lion rises with the sun knowing it must be the fastest or will starve, it doesn't make a difference if you are a lion or gazelle - you must be prepared.

This question was posed to the audience: Of 10,000 Olympians at each staging of the event, how many are prepared to give their best performance in the Olympic arena? In actual fact, only 20 per cent get better in their eventual performance. The reason is the total environment surrounding the event is very stressful.

Why aren't we prepared?

- Perceptions of fear;
- Unreasonable expectations;
- Surprised by conditions;
- Self-fulfilling prophecy;
- Unclear roles;
- Is that really what I look like? Here the use of video to show someone how they play is extremely useful;
- Distractions - If you have youth boys and girls at a same event, expect distraction. Parents can be a huge distraction as well as scouts/recruiters as well as the media;
- Fatigue - Makes cowards of us all!

Why is Fear Dangerous?

- Inhibits motor control;
- Slows down the thought process;
- It's not fun to be afraid;
- You create a cycle of failure;
- Stress and health problems;
- You are out of control.

Coping skills that are successful alleviate stress, but you need to expand your coping skills to try and find others so that you don't associate just a few skills with success.

Conquering Fear

- Control and coping skills help here;
- Block out distractions. Expose players to a variety of situations:
- Learn from every game. Keep a record of what you learned;
- Establish clear goals and dreams. This should be part of every coach's program;
- Trust yourself and your coach;
- Use imagery and mental rehearsal;
- Surround yourself with excellence.

Come up with ideas to help you cope with situations. Try to learn from a lot of people and circumstances. Experience is a good teacher.

Signs of Poor Preparation

- Inability to sleep or rest, "butterflies" get worse, a cold and clammy feeling, sudden feelings of weakness, need to use the bathroom, fine touch skills dissipate, seeming inability to warm up or get loose.
- Negative thoughts dominate, forgetfulness, mind is racing, talking a lot, focus on trash, seem lost or sleepy, change in personality.

How do you know you are fearful? You have to learn your own reactions to fear. You then learn coping skills. Once you have them, you need to identify yours so you can help others including your assistant coaches and players.

Can Your Players Stand the Heat?

Arousal sometimes dissipates skills. This can be overcome by learning to recognise the cues

that indicate a state of arousal and developing skills to cope with it. Self-talk is a good coping skill. A three step approach works well. When the state of arousal is identified, first relax, then narrow focus, then execute the skill. Mayhem can be converted into focus in as little as 10 seconds.

Autonomic Response Specificity

Whatever the stressor, players will react with a consistent pattern of responses that are individual and specific.

Generally a coach can look at a player and tell when a specific player is "up" and focused and when he or she is being diffused. Control is the key but it lies at the end of a gamut that ranges from one extreme, suicide, through depression, helpfulness, mindfulness, engagement, "in the zone" and, finally assertive control.

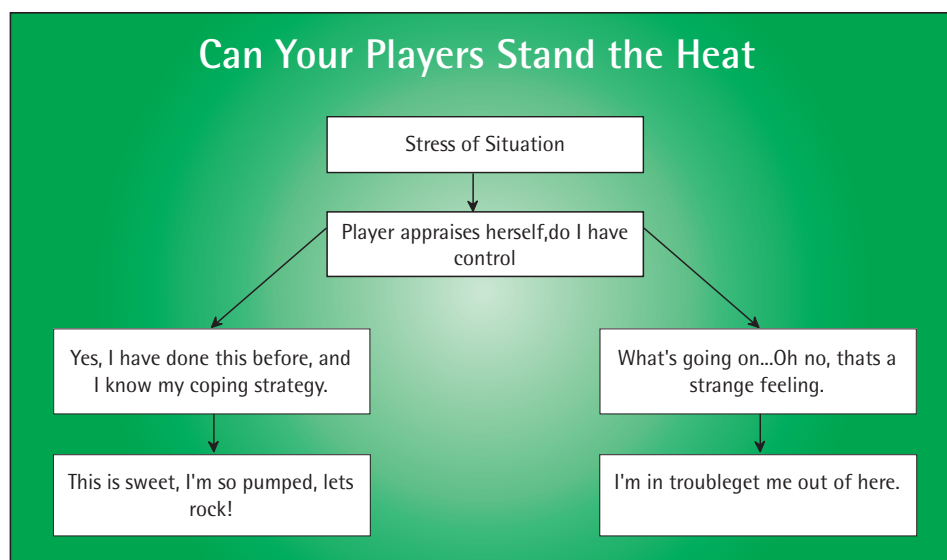
Lessons from Veteran Players

More mature players have the benefit of their experience to identify and develop their coping skills. Younger players can use them as role models and learn from them.

Characteristics of veteran players include:

- Nervousness, but their fears peak one week before a game
- Using multiple coping skills they have developed over time
- Automatic shifting into these coping skills
- Interpreting mental and physical signs as positive indicators of preparation

This is a learned skill of control.



Teaching Control Skills

Freigang shared with the audience a worksheet he has developed called "My Best Game/My Worst Game".

Filled out by the players, the sheet is used to teach coping skills. Using the "Best/Worst Games"

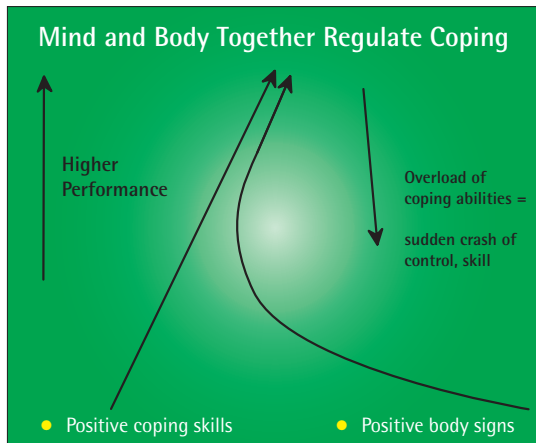
sheet following each game will provide data that, after 20 games, will allow patterns to be observed as the players learn to control certain aspects of their environment.

Assign players on the bench or non-players to fill out this form. Also assign bench players roles, such as watching certain players in their positions. The form should be out as soon after the game as possible.

The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

What you think about most comes true. What you think impacts on how you act and how you act generally influences the outcome.

Mind and Body Together Regulate Coping



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MY BEST/WORST GAMES

MY BEST GAME

What was the best game of your life? Try to recall the situation and honestly write out what the conditions were and anything that comes to mind about this great game. What can you reproduce in your preparation for future games. Can you use your experience?

Where did this performance occur? Date: Place:

What was your focus before the match? Is this what you wanted?

What do you remember about the game itself regarding your skills, fitness, marking?

How emotional were you during play?	FLAT	2 4 6 8 10	CHARGED
Did you have any worries?	NO WORRY	2 4 6 8 10	VERY SCARY
Did you have control during the game?	NO CONTROL	2 4 6 8 10	CONTROL
How was your mental state?	CALM	2 4 6 8 10	CRAZED
Did you stay focused at the right times?	NONE	2 4 6 8 10	FOCUSED
Were you automatic or controlled?	AUTOMATIC	2 4 6 8 10	INTENTIONAL

MY WORST GAME

The worst game I can remember?

What do you recall?

How emotional were you during play?	FLAT	2 4 6 8 10	CHARGED
Did you have any worries?	NO WORRY	2 4 6 8 10	VERY SCARY
Did you have control during the game?	NO CONTROL	2 4 6 8 10	CONTROL
How was your mental state?	CALM	2 4 6 8 10	CRAZED
Did you stay focused at the right times?	NONE	2 4 6 8 10	FOCUSED
Were you automatic or controlled?	AUTOMATIC	2 4 6 8 10	INTENTIONAL

What did you learn from this and how did you adjust?

What is your five day preparation routine? Tell how you get ready for your "A" game (Game 7 pm)

Monday		Tuesday	
Wednesday		Thursday	
Friday		Saturday	
Sunday			