

# Finding Your Peak Performance with Mental Skills Training:

ENJOY YOUR JOB  
KNOW YOUR JOB  
DO YOUR JOB

by Aaron Weintraub

## Table of Contents

<b>Preface</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The Drama</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>

### **PART 1 – PRELIMINARY CONCEPTS**

<b>Chapter 1 – Control</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Chapter 2 – Awareness</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Exercise: The Traffic Light Analogy</b>	
<b>Gathering</b>	
<b>Chapter 3 – Discipline</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Chapter 4 – Peak Performance</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Confident, Not Cocky</b>	
<b>Refined Indifference</b>	

### **PART 2 – ATTITUDE**

<b>Chapter 5 – Motivation</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Relentlessness</b>	
<b>Mission</b>	
<b>Chapter 6 – Perspective</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Worth Depends on Effort, Not Achievement</b>	
<b>Chapter 7 – Respect for the Game and Intensity</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Assume Nothing</b>	
<b>Chapter 8 - Self-Talk</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Uses of Self-Talk</b>	
<b>Positivism</b>	
<b>Common Patterns of Poor Self-Talk</b>	
<b>Self-Esteem Comes from Outcomes</b>	
<b>The Perfectionist</b>	
<b>Polarized (All-or-Nothing) Thinking</b>	
<b>Bad Absolutes: Always and Never</b>	
<b>Another Absolute: “I Can’t”</b>	
<b>I Hate the Word “Hate”</b>	
<b>Catastrophizing</b>	
<b>The Fallacy of Fairness</b>	
<b>Excuses</b>	
<b>Disproportionate Guilt</b>	
<b>Permanence</b>	
<b>Others</b>	
<b>Adjusting Poor Self-Talk</b>	
<b>Chapter 9 – Confidence</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Optimistic Explanatory Style</b>	
<b>The Knowledge Curve</b>	

<b>“Slumps”</b>	
<b>Which Comes First? Success or Confidence</b>	
<b>Chapter 10 - Arousal Control</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Fake It Until You Make It</b>	
<b>Poise</b>	
<b>Be Two Better</b>	
<b>Chapter 11 – Enjoy Your Job</b>	<b>53</b>

### **PART 3 – APPROACH**

<b>Chapter 12 – Preparation</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Attention to Details</b>	
<b>Practice to Perform in the “Clutch”</b>	
<b>Chapter 13 – Know Your Job!</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Aggressiveness Under Control</b>	
<b>Planning Strategy</b>	
<b>Tension and Relaxation</b>	
<b>Deep Breath</b>	
<b>Chapter 14 – Imagery</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Chapter 15 – Routines</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Example: Control, Plan, Trust</b>	
<b>Chapter 16 – Anchoring</b>	<b>71</b>

### **PART 4 – FOCUS**

<b>Chapter 17 – Presentness</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Let It Happen (The positive way to say “Don’t press” or “Don’t choke.”)</b>	
<b>Chapter 18 – Concentration and Focus</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Dimensions of Attentional Control</b>	
<b>Chapter 19 – Pressure</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Fear of “Failure”</b>	
<b>Coping with High Expectations</b>	
<b>Chapter 20 – Do Your Job!</b>	<b>82</b>

### **PART 5 – RESPONSE**

<b>Chapter 21 - Appropriate Adjustments</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Effective Rational Response</b>	
<b>Do not say “My bad”</b>	
<b>Avoid the Negative Snowball Effect – Just Do Your Best</b>	
<b>Release the Negative Emotion Attached to the Disappointing Outcome</b>	
<b>Do Not Change Just for the Sake of Change – Trust Your Approach</b>	
<b>Do Not Over-Adjust – Just Do Your Best</b>	
<b>Imagery: The Way to Fix a Flawed Mechanic During Competition</b>	
<b>Do Not Try to “Make Up” for a Mistake – Just Do Your Best</b>	
<b>Chapter 22 - Goal Setting: the SMART+2 System</b>	<b>90</b>

<b>The Drama Continues</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>Appendix A – Traffic Light Analogy Worksheets</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>Appendix B – Poem: Do You Want To Be A Champion?</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Appendix C – Concentration Drill – Random Numbers Grid</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>Appendix D – Goal Setting Worksheets</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>103</b>

## Preface

Do you perform well at certain times, but poorly at others? Do you work hard and have the capability, but still fail to consistently get the results you expect and deserve? Do you want to know exactly what to do to guarantee a successful performance in “clutch” situations? The solutions to these issues exist not in your physical skills or abilities, but in your mental skills. This book will show you how to bridge the gap between potential and performance by clarifying what you want, developing your self-awareness, and anchoring successful thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. You should have one or more specific performance scenarios in mind as you read and train your mind (e.g. baseball player, football player, golfer, musician, public speaker, etc.). This book is geared specifically towards athletes, although mental training applies to any performance situation.

Training your mind will significantly enhance your performance. As your level of play increases, the impact of the mental side of the game increases, in large part because the differences in competitors’ physical skills diminishes. The physical mechanics of sport are often taught with impressive skill, but it’s usually a sink-or-swim world when it comes to mental skills. Guidance for young athletes on this critical aspect of the game is non-existent at worst and spotty at best. Therefore, a coachable, hard-working athlete may consistently perform far below her potential because she is unaware of her deficient mental skills. She may hear comments like, “If we could just turn her brain off, she’d be one heck of a player,” but she has no strategies for doing this. She has not been taught the mental side of the game. Professional and Olympic performers have formal mental skills training readily available, but this course of study is not commonly available to most athletes.

The lucky young athletes are the ones who have parents and coaches who teach these mental skills effectively, usually without labeling them “mental skills.” (John Wooden is my favorite example. He taught these lessons obsessively, without speaking specifically of “psychology” or “mental skills.”) A few universities now have a sport psychologist on staff or an undergraduate course related to coaching the mental game. Many coaches work hard but do not coach the mental game effectively. Their personalities make it harder rather than easier for athletes to maintain an ideal attitude, focus, and perform. Poor verbal instructions such as “RELAX!!!!” “We need...” or “Don’t...” are commonplace.

I wrote this book because I want to help. I want you to do your best! I also want you to understand that your best is all you can do. You are an impressive person if you are trying to reach this lofty goal, and I am honored if you allow me to assist you in that process.

Sports psychology may seem confusing and complex. It shouldn’t. This book will open up the world of mental skills to you in an easy-to-understand manner. The principles are straightforward, so if you can combine desire with discipline, acquiring these skills is inevitable. This book will guide your quest with clear definitions, common examples, challenging ideas, and interesting stories.

I began thinking of this book while in college in the early ’90s and began to actually write it in graduate school in the late ’90s. I love the question, “Why?” The

most obvious coaching question is, “Why did that team win?” Broken down to its controllable component parts, these questions follow:

- Why did that team or individual perform at that level?
- Why does one person break down under pressure while another breaks through?
- Why does the athlete who played so well one day, play so poorly on another?

After a good deal of research, thought, trial-and-error with student-athletes, discussions with experts, and participation as an athlete or coach in well over 1,000 contests, I have a fairly good understanding of how the combination of an athlete’s mental and physical skills leads to his performances, which in turn leads to outcomes such as scoring or winning. This book is designed to share that understanding with you. In the process, it will explain the way for you to develop your mental skills so that your outcomes can be the ones that you’ve always dreamed of.

The study of mental skills herein is a progressive one divided into five parts. Each skill is explained in simple terms, but mastering the skill is not easy. You must not only know what to do, but also have the motivation and courage to do it.

Part 1 discusses the foundation skills of control, awareness, and discipline. Part 2 discusses how to optimize your *attitude* for performance. Part 3 discusses the skills needed to have the best *approach* possible for your performance. Part 4 looks at what to do when it is time to perform. A synopsis: *focus* and *trust* your stuff. Don’t think (or phrased in positive terms: be quiet). Finally, Part 5 addresses *responses*, thus completing the performance cycle. Effective responses lead to effective approaches; then an effective approach and a “locked in” focus lead to superior performances. These behaviors combined with a proper attitude throughout will guarantee success (as it should be defined)! They will also give you the best possible chance of achieving positive outcomes, like winning.

Sport psychology has been called the study of what successful athletes do. I am a quote fan, and I have included many quotes that relate to the topic being discussed. These quotes demonstrate that many famous performers have superb mental skills. You, too, will own these skills if you have enough *desire*, *patience*, and *persistence*. Be pleased with small steps; developing your mental skills is a process that takes time and effort. Occasional leaps forward in performance are likely, but there are no shortcuts. Take it one step at a time and if you continuously make appropriate adjustments, you will continually improve. This continual improvement is the essence of approaching your potential.

Before you begin, I am tempted to wish you luck in your pursuit of excellence. But since one point of all that follows is to take luck out of the equation as much as possible, I will resist. Instead, I wish you personal excellence and growth as you learn to coach yourself towards peak performances. And I trust that because you are sincere in your motivation and disciplined in your approach, the outcomes will work out for you just fine.

## The Drama

It is the bottom of the ninth inning in the last game of the Super Regionals. A record crowd is on hand and fired up to watch two powerhouse teams duke it out in pure championship competition. It is “put up” or “shut up” time, because this will be the final game of the year for the loser, but the catapult to the College World Series for the winner. The first two games have been close, but this final game is the best one yet. In the bottom of the second inning, Mark’s team opened the scoring with a single run on a beautiful triple off the center field wall, but the visitors answered with a two-run home run in the top of the fifth. Since then, the pitching has dominated, keeping the score at 2-1. Now it’s the bottom of the ninth, there are men on first and third, two outs, and the best hitter in the league is up to bat. It is “Do or Die” time. Mark is on deck.

Mark truly loves baseball; his life has revolved around the game for the past 15 years. He is a senior who’s had a solid collegiate career. He will probably not get drafted into professional baseball, however, because he stands only 5’9” tall and is an average runner at best. The possibility that this will be his last game playing organized baseball briefly crosses his mind as the count on the current batter goes to 3-2. In the stands, the fans love this excitement. Despite their confidence in the home team, which has already won 45 games this year, many hearts are pounding as though they are trying to escape from their cages. In the dugout and in the stands, palms are sweaty and stomach butterflies are jumping. Through the incredible tension of this moment, the pitcher tries to throw a nasty slider... but it is outside for ball four. Now, Mark must step into the batter’s box.

Is he prepared?

## Introduction

**Developing** and refining my mental game has played a critical role in my success.

For years, players have had to develop these skills on their own.

- Dave Winfield, Baseball Hall-of-Famer

**For** me, learning to have a routine that keeps me focused on things I have control of has been most helpful.

-Tim Salmon, Baseball Player

**Solid** training in the mental game allows us to meet obstacles head-on and play with every ounce of our ability.

Jim Abbott, (One-armed) Baseball Player

There is a common misconception in the sports world that if a person practices and trains hard enough physically, everything else will fall into place. Reality frequently teaches us otherwise. In addition to your own experiences, there are mountains of evidence that support the idea that mental skills are critical for performing up to your potential. Today, a web search for the keywords “sport psychology” will reveal millions of links. Over 95% of American Olympians in the past thirty years have received formal mental skills training. Today, sports psychologists or mental skills coaches are employed by almost every NFL, MLB, and NBA team, by most professional golfers and tennis players, by IMG Sports Academies, and by some agents.

Mental skills are critical to your success in any sports or other performance endeavor. This book will open the door to understanding those skills. While you'll need to train your mental skills along with your physical skills throughout your sports career, a clear understanding of these skills is half the battle. This book will specifically explain how mental skills impact performance. This knowledge will enable you to effectively coach yourself to approach your potential. You will gain awareness of what to look for within yourself, and what to avoid. By learning how your thoughts impact your performance, you'll be well on your way to winning the mental battle.

There are two broad purposes for having effective mental skills: performance enhancement *and* personal growth. Fortunately, the skills for both are the same. Before any performer can effectively get the job done, he must precisely *know what to do*. Without guidance, acquisition of mental skills is haphazard and slowed. Systematic improvement of your mental game can clearly provide an edge over your unguided competition. Athletes who are in a hurry to find out how good they can become will be attracted to this course of study.

Do not accept the idea that getting “hot” is something that merely happens by chance. It is true that you cannot *make* it happen, but you *can* increase the frequency that it happens, and its duration. Take responsibility for coaching yourself towards your best possible performance by putting yourself in a position to succeed. Do everything you can control to perform up to your potential. What can you control? Great question...

## PART 1 – PRELIMINARY CONCEPTS

*There is a choice you have to make,  
In everything you do.  
So keep in mind that in the end,  
The choice you make, makes you.*

### Chapter 1 - Control

I've brainwashed myself to remember that you can't control your last pitch. It's already been thrown. So get over it. All you can control is the next pitch you're going to throw.

-Kevin Brown, Baseball Pitcher

It's easy to say success is having a gold medal or winning a championship, but I think it is much more than that. It's being able to know I did absolutely everything I could possibly do to win. The results are less significant than the effort.

-Kelly Williams, 1998 Female Athlete of the Year

I can control the pitches I make, how I handle my mechanics, how I control my frame of mind. [It] benefited me most ...when I realized that I can't control what happens outside of my pitching.

-Greg Maddux, Baseball Pitcher

Know your job! Know what can be controlled and what cannot. Uncontrollable aspects of sports include your opponent's performance, your genetic capability, adjudication, and other aspects of luck. Your behavior, on the other hand, is completely within your control. Behavior includes all details of your attitude, your approach, your focus, and your response. (These are the next four major parts of this book.) It also includes the mechanics of your performance, which is determined by a combination of your mental skills and your preparation. (Preparation itself is a product of your work on both your physical and mental skills.)

Control is paramount. Clearly, trying to control uncontrollable variables will lead to frustration and disappointment. It makes no sense to worry about things outside your control, yet we all fall into that trap at times. Any attempt by an athlete to have absolute control over outcomes is futile.

You need to know your job if you're going to do it effectively, and your job must be completely controllable. An inappropriate focus of attention in trying to control too much can be a double-edged sword because it leads both to frustration and to neglect of what can be controlled, namely your behavior. John Wooden said, "Don't whine, don't complain, and don't make excuses." Behave like a champion by maintaining your self-control and doing your best to do your appropriately defined job in every situation.

Wooden is a coach who clearly understands the impact of thoughts on performance, and history proves that he taught his players to think effectively. Who is the greatest coach ever? It's impossible to say for sure, but the discussion has to include John Wooden. According to him, he never spoke to his players about winning a basketball game. Nevertheless, his teams at UCLA won 10 national championships over a 12-year period. At one point, they won 88 straight games. Wooden did speak often of what it takes to do your best. His *Pyramid of Success* (Figure 1) clarifies the steps necessary to climb to the pinnacle, which is success.