



If you would like to submit a question or topic to be covered in Coach's Corner, reply to this email with your question and be on the lookout for it next week!

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Today's Topic

Welcome back to the Coach's Corner!

Over the past 13 weeks we've talked about multiple 'Mental Skills' topics, different coaching styles, and quite a few different things that pertain to sport psychology and mental performance coaching. But this week instead of talking about one specific skill or topic, I want to focus heavily on the second section of this newsletter:

'How Can I Apply This?'

Every week in this section my goal is to break down whatever the topic was to a point where it can be implemented by coaches at all different levels. This week is no different. I want to look at Mental Training as a whole and the different ways it can be practiced and implemented by coaches on a daily basis.

Let's take high school sports to make a general example...

You play one time a week and practice 5 of the other 6 days each week for an average of 2 hours each day. That's 10 hours of practice per week to prepare for one 2-3 hour competition. I think that's a pretty good ratio for practice compared to competition. I don't think there is a perfect formula, but as we've talked before, it is very easy to overdo it (but that's not the point of this example).

So 10 hours a week to practice the physical skills you need in order to perform at your best when its competition time. Perfect.

As we've discussed time and time again, mental skills work just the same. They have to be taught, learned, and practiced in order for them to work for our athletes.

So how many hours per week are we dedicating to practicing those mental skills?

Probably 0. Right?

This is the problem that I see most often when talking about mental skills training with coaches. They understand the topics and the importance of them, but they're never practiced on a daily basis. This can be for a number of reasons, but the most common is the 'lack of practice time'. I get it, I've been there, but mental skills training doesn't have to take long-maybe 5 or 10 minutes at the end of practice each day.

It's awesome to talk about mental skills at the start of the year, and set goals, and do everything to start the year on the

right foot, but without continued mental training throughout the year, it was all for not.

You wouldn't teach a kid how to hit a baseball at practice 1, then never practice hitting again for the rest of the year would you? Of course not. So why is that the way we treat mental skills?

The goal of today's newsletter is to provide you with a handful of different mental training activities that you can implement on a daily basis for just a few minutes to help improve mental skills and prepare for the long haul of a season. This is far from a comprehensive list of mental skills activities, instead just a handful that are easy to implement and easy for young athletes to grasp and participate in.

Mental Skills Training doesn't have to be Rocket Science!

How Can I Apply This?

Daily Mental Training

What mental skills you choose to focus on each and every day will differ depending on what your team needs the most and what skills are most important for your particular sport. Certain skills are much more important in some sports compared to others.

Some of the activities I'm going to go through in this section will be targeted at a specific skill with the goal of practicing and improving it. While others will be more broad and focused on improving overall mental strength and well-being.

1. Meditation

Meditation is something that always raises some eyebrows when I bring it up because it can seem a little 'hippy' to some people. But we are simply talking about getting our minds and bodies as calm as possible and allowing ourselves to completely relax for just a little bit.

By doing this we're allowing our athletes to get some much needed down time. Student-athletes are so busy and are being pulled in so many different directions, they hardly have time to relax throughout their day. Now we are giving them that opportunity to relax at practice everyday.

This mediation can be guided by using something like 'Headspace' or 'Calm' to help them get into a meditative state. Or it can be a completely silent time for them to think and allow their minds to wander all over the place. This provides them the chance to reconnect with their imaginations and start using the parts of their brain that produce visualizations (our next point).

It doesn't have to be anything crazy, but you'll be surprised how powerful just 5 minutes of peace and quiet can be for young athletes. If you can't think of a specific skill or activity for your team, a great default choice is a little mediation time.

2. Visualization Training

This is a topic we dove really deep into back in Coach's Corner #4, which you can find a PDF copy of toward the bottom of the page [HERE](#).

In that article we dive into why visualization can be so powerful and all the benefits it can provide your athletes. Visualization will always be one of my favorite skills to teach because it might be the most beneficial one; it can do so much good!

To implement it into practice, it won't take anything crazy.

We can start by introducing our athletes to what visualization is and giving them a mock visualization to try, like the 'Lemon Exercise' or something else not necessarily sports related.

Then we can develop a visualization scenario that fits the whole team and read it to them or play them the recording every day at the end of practice while they are sitting or laying down in a meditative, relaxed state. This 'team-based' visualization script could be walking them through getting off the bus, getting dressed, and taking the field before a big game. This

works because it's something every member of the team can relate to.

If you want to get more advanced and in-depth for each athlete, you can help them each write a script that is specific to them, record it, and have them listen to it with headphones in the same fashion.

Visualization is a really deep rabbit-hole that you can always go deeper on. You can always get more specific and more niche, which only makes it more effective. But no matter how far you take it, by providing 10 or so minutes a few days a week for your athletes to practice visualizing their skills, you are helping them sharpen those skills through mental reps and preparing them for anything that could happen during games.

3. Reflection and Recovery

This activity accomplishes a few things on both the mental and physical sides of training. This activity can be done while your athletes are stretching out, doing yoga, foam rolling, or any other type of physical recovery they would normally do at the end of practice.

The only change from 'the norm' is that while they are doing their physical recovery, you are going to be leading them through some reflections on practice that day. Asking them some questions to get them thinking about the good, bad, and ugly of the practice they just completed.

You can ask these as rhetorical questions and have them think in quiet about what their responses are, or it can be a large group discussion breaking down the practice that day. This will probably depend on what your athletes would respond best to. (If they're a talkative group prone to getting off topic, the silent option is probably your best bet!)

Some questions I like to ask are: What went well today? What didn't go so well, and how can we improve it next time? What was your favorite and least favorite parts of practice? How was your effort and attitude today? What could have made practice more

effective for you? What drills did the most for you today?
How're you feeling about our upcoming game?

The list could go on forever, but getting your athletes to start analyzing the work they are putting in gets them much more engaged in the process, helps them take pride in their work, and gets them to critique themselves on their own.

We are accomplishing all of this while they take care of their bodies and ensure they are at their best when its time to do it all again tomorrow, because we know the odds of every athlete doing proper recovery on their own time isn't real high.

4. Focus and Breath Training

Sort of 2 topics in 1 here, but they can be done together or split up into 2 different activities.

If you've read many of these newsletters or any of the other content I produce, you already know that I talk a lot about the importance of our breathing and knowing how to use it to calm us down and get us in the right headspace to compete.

Our athletes learning proper breathing techniques to help calm nerves and get them focused is a great tool for them to have. Practicing deep diaphragmatic (belly) breathing is a great place to start. Helping them learn how to consciously breathe with a purpose is a really powerful thing for most athletes.

Along with practicing this breathing, by doing this at the end of practice, we are also helping assist in that recovery process we just talked about. They should be tired at this point, and now we are helping replenish their Oxygen stores and starting that physical recovery process.

Focus training is the other aspect that can be added here. While having your athletes practice breathing you can ask them to focus on very specific things or cues that you give them. This is where you can get really creative and challenge your athletes. By practicing the ability to focus on command, they are improving their ability to 'flip the switch' when its go-time for a game.

While the ability to focus properly isn't quite as simple as 'flipping a switch' training that ability is giving your athletes a new set of skills that will benefit them especially when times get tough or stressful in game.

These two skills (breathing and focus) are things that our athletes use every single day both in and out of sports, so I think they are extremely important to practice at least a time or two per week after practice.

Now depending on what your schedule looks like, implementing these into your daily practice routines can look very different. My best advice for getting the most out of these activities is to find the 2-3 skills will help your team the most, use a corresponding activity, and plan to do it for the last 5-15 minutes of practice each day.

I like doing it at the end of practice because this is when athletes are obviously the most tired and will have the most success relaxing and training their minds. It also simulates the feeling of being tired during a game and having to focus on a mental skill to help them perform better even though they may be exhausted.

The argument that there isn't enough practice time to incorporate these activities and techniques is hard for me to buy. If we take a look at our practice plans, I'm sure we can all find somewhere where we are wasting 5-10 minutes that could be better spent doing some mental training.

This stuff isn't an overnight cure, but over time through consistent practice and effort, you will start to see the changes your athletes make and you'll be astounded.

Trust the process, do the little things, and help your athletes use their minds as a tool!

This Week In Sports

We have a 2-for-1 deal this week...

The MLB is in a Rough Spot Right Now

It's crazy to see Major League Baseball in the news so much in late November and early December. Normally I would be really excited to catch any baseball news I could during the offseason, but these stories weren't the ones I was hoping for.

1. The MLB is currently locked out.

December 1st was the deadline for the MLB and the Players Association to reach an agreement on the new Collective Bargaining Agreement, but they couldn't come to a compromise in time (which was somewhat expected) so they MLB locked the players out.

This basically means that the players aren't technically employed by their teams until this is resolved, which could put next season in jeopardy if they aren't able to resolve this quickly.

I'm not going to go into all the bureaucratic junk that led to this happening and all the points that the two sides can't seem to agree on in part because it is a LOT of info, and also because I'm a sport psychologist, not a lawyer and I don't understand half of it.

ESPN did post an article that breaks it down pretty well and provides some of the key takeaways for us laymen out here.

[Check out the article **HERE**.](#)

I'm just hoping that this can all get cleared up, the players can get the pay and treatment they deserve, and we can get onto the 2022 season...

But the lockout was the smaller of the 2 news stories that came out of the MLB this past week.

2. The MLB Used 2 Different Types of Balls in 2021.

Last week Business Insider released a massive investigative article that found that the MLB admitted to using 2 different types of baseballs in games last season, which on the surface doesn't seem that bad. Until you realize that one type of ball was deadened, meaning it didn't fly nearly as far off the bat, while the other was a juiced ball that statistically came off the bat much faster and travelled further. But that's just the start of it.

It was also reported that the Players Association and Owners new about this and chose not to inform the players or coaching staffs.

AND... The MLB admitted that the 'juiced' balls were used in high-profile primetime games like the Field of Dreams Game to produce more homeruns, higher scores, and in-turn more exciting games. While the 'deadened' balls were sent to small market, low attendance games like a Tuesday afternoon game between the Kansas City Royals and Texas Rangers for example.

The deeper this story goes, the more insane it gets. Rob Manfred (the MLB Commissioner) and all the 'higher ups' in the league have lost their minds pulling a stunt like this. This move directly impacted baseball games, changed the outcomes of who knows how many at-bats, and really makes you look at the 2021 season a little bit differently.

The cherry on top in my opinion is that Manfred will most likely see no consequences or repercussions for this move, all while guys like Pete Rose and Barry Bonds can't get into the Hall of Fame because they 'tarnished the game'. It's a bunch of B.S. in my opinion!

So yeah, the MLB is not in a great spot right now. The league looks like an absolute circus with Rob Manfred being the ring leader.

[Here is a synopsis from Bleacher Report](#) of the larger Business Insider article breaking down this entire scandal.

p.s. Fire Rob Manfred :)

Other Sport Psych References

To stay on the trend of doing this week's newsletter slightly different than we've done the past 13 editions, I'm going to do this section a little different too.

This is a bit of a longer newsletter with a lot of information up above, so instead of giving you more resources, I'll give you a couple different accounts I recommend following on Social Media to get some sport psych and mental performance content on your feed daily!

1. Strecker Sport Psych (obviously)

[Twitter](#)

[Instagram](#)

[Facebook](#)

2. Hannah Huesman

[Twitter](#)

[Instagram](#)

3. Justin Su'a

[Twitter](#)

[Instagram](#)

[Youtube](#)

Hannah and Justin are two of the top minds in the field and are always putting out amazing content that can benefit athletes, coaches, parents, administrators... just about anyone interested in high level athletic performance.

Sport Psychology and Mental Training is one of those fields where we all teach pretty similar topics but we all word it

differently. The way I say it may not click with you, but when it's put a different way it just might click. It's important to give yourself as many resources as possible and always continue learning and improving!

Quick Quote



"Excellence is the gradual result of always striving to do better."

-Pat Riley

Check out Older Editions of the Coach's Corner at the Bottom of the Page Here:

<https://www.streckersportpsych.com/coachs-corner>

Thank you for reading and until next week, remember:

Today is a great day to change a life!

Cheers,

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