

# Winners don't let negative thoughts take over their lives

By Bob Frisk

Think like a winner.

That's sound advice for every high school athlete, but it's also not that easy.

Winners understand the power of positive thoughts, but we're living in a world filled with negative thoughts. They surround us every day.

I don't know the percentage of your time spent watching television, listening to the radio, reading newspapers or magazines, going to movies or scrolling the Internet, but I do know the negative information you find there is overwhelming.

And not surprising.

It's gotten so bad on the radio I listen to music stations or CDs in my car.

I also rarely watch TV news because I know they'll spend most of the time dealing with negative stories. I can wait for my morning newspaper, which probably also will lead with negative news.

Maybe it's just easier to digest in the morning.

Television and newspapers know a tragic accident grabs and holds more viewers and readers than a feel-good charity fund-raiser put on by an Eagle Scout.

Negative news — if it bleeds, it leads — sells better than positive news. It's as simple as that.

It's all about ratings and ad revenue and, frankly, considering the state of the newspaper business these days, I can understand that thinking a lot better now than I did even a year ago.

Talk radio is another source of negativity. I call it confrontational radio because the hosts usually are looking for ways to stir up their audience for some lively conversation. And there's no accountability for the Joe Sixpacks who call in to vent. You also have trouble escaping negativity in a theater. How many movies are out there with positive messages? Maybe that's why the charming "Hairspray" appealed to me this summer even at my advanced age.

I read that 90 percent of the input we get in the world is negative. And 90 percent of the things we tell ourselves are negative.

Maybe those percentages are too high, but it would be difficult to dispute them.

Young people, beware.

It's too easy to be easily swayed by all this negativity. Pessimistic people surround

you, and if you're not careful, their pessimism will start rubbing off.

As a high school athlete, you have to be very careful about letting all these negative thoughts take over your life.

I think four main obstacles tend to get in the way of maintaining a positive attitude — fear, worry, anger and doubt.

If you have a bad practice or game, your immediate response is to become fearful. Fear triggers worry.

Fear and worry trigger anger.

Doubt follows all these negative emotions.

You must always focus on the future rather than the past. Don't keep worrying about who did what or who is to blame.

If you are faced with a difficulty, you must focus on the solution and not the problem.

Doesn't that thought process make more sense than rehashing the problem?

Solutions are inherently positive. They take you away from the negative thoughts.

The focus must be on where you want to be and what you want to do. And then begin moving in that direction ... immediately.

Winners must learn techniques to replace the negative with the positive.

You have to work on yourself until you reach the point where you believe you will be a total success in anything you want to accomplish.

Commitment is the glue that holds everything together. It's the most powerful tool you have as a human being.

The key to success is going from being interested to being committed.

It all starts when you roll out of bed each day.

Winners wake up every morning with excitement, enthusiasm and confidence.

Winners tell themselves that this is going to be a great day, good things are going to happen.

Winners feel that each day will bring success their way.

Winners set their minds for victory.

Are you a winner?

What was your first thought when you woke up this morning?

Positive or negative?

There's your answer.

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# Understanding & Using the feelings of failure: Your doorway to success

By: Dr. Alan Goldberg

The truth of the matter is that as an athlete, you can't reach your goals and dreams without enough failures and setbacks! In fact, in everything that you do, both on and off the playing fields, your failures are a prerequisite for your eventual success! This statement usually blows the minds of most athletes I come in contact with who mistakenly view losing and failure as bad things. How can failure be positive and constructive? Is this an Alice In Wonderland kind of thing where "up" is suddenly "down" and "down" is now "up?" Hardly!

The typical athlete tends to have an adversarial relationship with failing and making mistakes. He/she views both as something embarrassing and noxious to be avoided at all costs. Unfortunately, when you view failing and making mistakes as bad, you become more vulnerable to being overwhelmed by performance pressures when you compete.

If you are afraid of losing or making mistakes and these fears are somewhere near your consciousness at game time, then you are far more likely to perform tentatively. This is because you will be weighed down by the burden of how much you have to lose in the competition. Your "outcome focus" will tighten your muscles, distract your concentration from the flow of the game and insure that your performance will be way off, a mere shadow of your full potential. If you fear failing and/or making mistakes you will play as if you were tied in knots. Since the secret to peak performance is being physically and mentally relaxed, fear of failure/making mistakes tightens you up and makes peak performance impossible. The ultimate irony here is that your worry about making mistakes and failing will actually insure that you will do both a lot!

Going into any competition fearing failure, while quite common, means that you have developed an unhealthy relationship with it. It means that you really don't understand the true nature of failing. Instead, you must learn to cultivate a very different, healthier relationship with failing and making mistakes, a relationship based upon relaxed acceptance. Losing and making mistakes are NOT your archenemies! They are, instead natural parts of the process of

growth and development as an athlete and a person. They are important components of a vehicle that will ultimately lead you to success.

Keep in mind that when I talk about a “relaxed acceptance” of failure, I am NOT for one minute suggesting that you embrace mediocrity. I am not telling you that you should feel pleased with yourself whenever you lose or fail. If you’re like any serious athlete, then you hate losing with a passion. For the committed athlete, this is a normal response to failure. Understand that acceptance of failing doesn’t mean that you suddenly stop trying or give up on your pursuit of excellence. It simply means that you must view failure constructively as a natural part of the success process. Failing and making mistakes are what every athlete at every level does a lot of!

Understand that no one breaks into the athletic arena and experiences only perfection and success. This is not the real world! This doesn’t even happen in a Disney movie! There are always obstacles to be overcome, big mistakes to be made and failures and setbacks to suffer through. Simply put, you can’t go from recreational/beginner athlete to accomplished/elite performer without a whole lot of heartache and failure thrown in along the way. You can’t reach a high level of competence in your sport without first experiencing a fair amount of incompetence! This concept is the very heart of learning and mastery.

The learning process in and out of sports always involves failures. Every time that you lose or fall short, you are presented with an opportunity to take a positive step forward in your sport. This is because failure provides you as an athlete with very valuable information about what you just did wrong. When you look carefully enough, and don’t get distracted by the accompanying emotions, failure will almost always tell you what you need to do differently next time in order to get better results.

This isn’t remarkable information I’m sharing with you. This is the foundation of establishing muscle memory that accomplished sports performance is based upon. By repeating a skill over and over again, your muscles eventually learn that “just right feel” of executing the skill correctly. Without all the repetitions, both correct and incorrect, you could never master that particular skill. The incorrect repetitions in this process are equally as valuable to your learning as the times that you do the skills correctly. Simply put, by doing it wrong enough times you eventually learn to do it right. For example, a gymnastics coach once told me that the learning of a basic skill on any

apparatus requires that you must do that skill wrong at least 300 times before you can get begin to get it right.

Isn't this just like what your Kindergarten teachers repeatedly told you way back when? "It's OK to make mistakes children because you always learn from them." Let's go back even further. This is exactly how you learned to walk as a baby. The process of falling enough times taught your infant body and muscles how to successfully balance and coordinate themselves so that you could eventually move upright without falling.

We could stand to learn a lot from our baby selves. As a baby, your attitude towards mistakes and failing was a much healthier one than you probably have today. Intuitively, your baby self understood that falling was how you learned to walk. When you did fall, there was no negative judgment or self-directed anger. You didn't get discouraged or begin to think negatively, that "I'll NEVER learn to walk!" As a one year old, you hadn't been taught the self-limiting myth that making mistakes and failing was a cause for embarrassment and upset. So when you fell, you simply picked yourself up and tried again and again. It was only later that your parents, siblings, teachers and/or the larger society eventually convinced you that making mistakes and failing was something awful and embarrassing that needed to be avoided.

Intellectually most of us have taken in the lesson from school that "you learn from your mistakes." Intellectually! However, the vast majority of us have not yet learned this lesson on an emotional level. What do I mean by this? Making mistakes and failing are almost always accompanied by very powerful, seemingly negative emotions! Losing and failing hurts! It's embarrassing and frustrating! It's discouraging, depressing, demoralizing and disappointing. Furthermore, if you fail enough times, heavy-duty self-doubts begin to kick in. Enough failures get you to start questioning your ability to ever get things right and achieve your goals. All these feelings make up a very potent, emotional cocktail!

In fact, these feelings of failure are extremely intense and compelling, causing us to get "emotionally hijacked" by them. Instead of being able to put the failure or mistake in the proper perspective as a learning experience, we're left feeling badly about ourselves. Understand this: It is absolutely critical that the seemingly negative quality of these emotions not do distract you. In the long run, these feelings of failure are NOT negative. On the contrary!! Their negative appearance is only part of their camouflage. Within these

uncomfortable feelings lie the seeds to your ultimate success in everything that you do in life. It's these feelings of failure that make up the doorway to success that I've been talking about. You must learn to recognize these feelings as something both normal and positive. You must learn to interpret the feelings of failure as something that you move towards, NOT away from. Success can only be yours when you get in the habit of doing this.

What this means is that feelings of discouragement, for example, are supposed to be there as you travel along the road to success. They are nothing more than a street sign pointing you in the right direction! Do not interpret them for what they appear to be: a reason to feel badly about yourself and give up! When you feel discouraged, these emotions actually mean that you're getting closer to your goal, NOT further away. It's the same thing with feelings of frustration and self-doubts. Rather than allowing these feelings to dictate a lack of effort and potential quitting, reframe them as a positive sign that you are actually getting closer to your goal. When you view these feelings of failure as a sign that you are moving towards success, you will always respond to setbacks with renewed determination, motivation and increased effort. It's this kind of motivated response to failure that will ultimately help you push through that doorway and achieve success.

Remember, every athlete feels these so-called negative feelings when they fail or consistently mess up. Experiencing the feelings of failure doesn't mean that you are a failure. Making mistakes and failing are temporary events. As long as you pick yourself up and keep going, they are NOT permanent. The feelings that go with them need to be reframed by you as you experience them. That is, you must get in the habit of changing the meaning of these feelings of discouragement, disappointment, frustration, self-doubts and anger. Recognize them for what they really are: The doorway to success. See them. Experience them. Tell yourself that they are supposed to be there and keep moving forward towards them!

# Properly handling your children's feeling of failure

Dr. Alan Goldberg

When I speak to parents groups around the country one of my more important messages is: “If you really want to give your children the gift of success in everything that they do in their lives, then teach them how to fail!” The absolute worst thing that a parent can ever teach a child about failing is that it is a bad thing and cause for shame/embarrassment. Unfortunately, this is the lesson that is most often taught in our culture, a lesson that always leaves a child feeling fearful about his/her performance. Fear of failure is probably one of the biggest causes of repetitive performance problems both in and out of sports. This worry steals your child’s enjoyment of the sport, tightens his/her muscles, distracts him/her from the proper concentration and insures that his/her performance will consistently be way below potential.

As a parent you need to go out of your way to help your children separate themselves from the outcome of their performances. You need to help them let go of the twisted notion that making mistakes and failing are two of the worst things that they could possibly ever do. This means that both verbally and non-verbally you have to consistently give them the message that they are NOT their performances. Simply put, when they perform badly, they are NOT bad or when they struggle performance-wise or lose, they are not losers. This means that you have to help them better handle the natural feelings that are associated with failing. How successful you are in doing this depends upon your ability to take an honest look at yourself in the mirror.

Last week I met with a 16 year old tennis player, the youngest of three boys. Mike was referred to me by his father for problems with choking under pressure. It seemed that whenever the match got close, Mike would become overwhelmed by nervousness and stop playing his normally relaxed and aggressive game. Instead, he would get very tentative and defensively push the ball back. As a consequence, he would often steal defeat from the closing jaws of victory and lose to much weaker players. More important, Mike told me that he hadn’t had much fun playing tennis over the past year and half because he was constantly too stressed whenever he competed.

It's interesting to note here that Mike's next older brother, Billy, 17, who was a very talented tennis player in his own right, had recently quit the game a year earlier because it was no longer fun for him either. A few years before that, the boys' oldest brother, Josh had been scouted by a number of high level college baseball teams during his junior year in high school but then he had suddenly and inexplicably quit the game. He refused to talk about it with his parents other than saying "I hate baseball and don't want to play anymore!"

How do we explain this interesting family pattern? Predictably! It turns out that the boys' father put a tremendous amount of pressure on each of his sons to excel in their sport. Whenever they performed badly, the father had a tendency to get really angry at them. At times he would leave a game or match in disgust if they were playing badly or losing. After a loss, he wouldn't speak to the "offending" son for several days. Josh had quit baseball because it stopped being fun for him and because he was sick and tired of fighting with his dad after games. Apparently the same thing had happened with Billy and his tennis. While Mike loved the game and didn't want to quit, his performance problems and lack of enjoyment were pushing him in that direction. Like his brothers' problems, Mike's struggles were a direct result of the pressure that his dad put on him to excel and win.

While I know for a fact that Mike's dad meant well and truly wanted his boys to be happy and successful, he was totally unaware of how destructive his responses were to his sons' failures and mistakes. He had inadvertently, by his behaviors taught all of his boys that making mistakes and failing was not only unacceptable, but something that they should avoid at all costs. In the family, the consequences for making mistakes and failing were clear and predictable: Dad would be disappointed and angry and there would be hell to pay for the "offending" son!

As a result of this conditioning, Mike was overly concerned with the outcome of his matches. He was so worried that his dad was going to be upset with how he played after the match that he put an undue amount of pressure on himself before and during the match to be perfect with every shot he hit. Trying to be perfect as an athlete is ABSOLUTE POISON! It creates a sense of internal urgency that tightens muscles, distracts concentration and sabotages performance. This sense of urgency intensifies with every mistake

the athlete makes. I know of no better way to set an athlete up to choke than to get him/her worried about making mistakes and failing.

Teaching your children to over-focus on the outcome in this manner will insure that they follow the very same footsteps as Josh, Billy and Mike. They will be fearful approaching competitions, be unable to stay relaxed and properly focused throughout them and will eventually come to hate the sport before they prematurely quit. Do you want your children to have this kind of relationship with their sport? Do you want them to be overly focused on you and worried about your disapproval when they compete?

If you would sincerely like to help your children develop a healthier, more rewarding relationship with their game, then it's up to you to teach them to have a more relaxed relationship with failing and making mistakes. This means that you have to help them relax more when they go into competition. You have to help them understand that the main purpose of them playing their game is to grow as a person and have fun. Sports are a vehicle through which an athlete can learn valuable life lessons and, in the process, learn to feel good about him/herself. This can never happen if you make the main purpose to win. You may think that you are really helping your son and daughter by emphasizing the outcome in this way. Unfortunately the contrary is true! You are really hurting them.

How do you help your children have a more relaxed attitude towards failing and making mistakes? You do so by how you respond to and manage their feelings of failure. When your children fail or make mistakes, YOU have to learn to respond more appropriately and constructively.

Let me state the obvious here: NO CHILD MAKES MISTAKES AND LOSES BECAUSE HE/SHE WANTS TO! NO CHILD WANT HIS/HER PARENTS TO BE DISAPPOINTED IN HIM/HER. What are the implications of this? When your child fails, he already feels miserable. Even before you open your mouth to criticize or offer "helpful" hints, your son or daughter is already hurting big time! He/she may be embarrassed, ashamed, frustrated, discouraged, sad, angry with him/herself, struggling with feelings of worthlessness, etc. Before you decide to get angry at them and tell them how much of an embarrassment they are to you, STOP & THINK! How is what you're about to say going to help them? How will it make them feel better about themselves? How will it

motivate them to improve? More important, HOW WILL IT HELP THEM MANAGE THE PAIN THAT THEY ARE ALREADY EXPERIENCING?

If you overtly or covertly show your displeasure with their failing, if you criticize or put them down for not living up to your expectations, angrily walk out on them when they're losing, then you should know that at that very moment, YOU ARE DOING YOUR CHILD A SERIOUS DISSERVICE. To respond to their pain by making them feel even more pain is to emotionally traumatize them. When you do this you fail your child in far more serious ways than striking out to end the game, getting beaten in the last 25 or losing a match.

To teach your child how to have a healthy attitude towards failing you must respond constructively to their feelings of failure: Specifically this means that when they fail you must:

1) Respond with empathy, NOT anger – Step inside their shoes for an instant and feel the pain that they're feeling. Then respond to their pain, NOT your own selfish needs and wants. For example, you see how upset your daughter is after a loss and, at an appropriate time you say, "That must really hurt hon. I can see how frustrated and disappointed you are. It really feels pretty crappy to give it your all like you did and to come up short. Just keep in mind that you'll have plenty of other games and there will be other chances." 2)

Respond with compassion, NOT shame inducing comments or behavior – A compassionate response is one that offers kindness, forgiveness and hope to a child. It allows that child to begin to heal and constructively make use of the failure. For example, "It sure sucks to lose. It's really frustrating. But even though you're really disappointed, I want you to try and be kind to yourself.

You did some things well and you want to be able to forgive yourself if things didn't turn out exactly how you wanted." 3) Respond with relaxation, NOT tension – If you are tense watching your children compete and then respond to them from this tense place, you can be sure that what you say and do with them won't be burdened by deep waves of thought. When you are emotional and tense, you will say hurtful, emotionally damaging things that you'll ultimately regret. Try to stay calm and relaxed when interacting with your child after that bad performance. 4) Engage, DO NOT withdraw – The very last thing that your child needs from you when he/she is hurting after a failure is for you to angrily withdraw. What they need instead is for you to sensitively

and lovingly engage them. This does not mean that you should offer criticism for what they've done wrong or force them to talk about the game. These kinds of responses do not address their feelings of failure. Unless you address their feelings of failure, you will not be correctly teaching them how to use failure to become successful. So physically and emotionally be there for them when they struggle. After all, this is the time when they need you, the parent the most! 5) Be kind, NOT mean – This may seem a little obvious, but it still needs to be said. Listen to yourself when you talk to your children after failures. Are you being kind to them in your words and tone? Reframe from hurtful comments like, "you're a total embarrassment" or "if you're going to continue to perform this way, then I should just stop wasting my money on you!" Remember, this is your son or daughter that you're talking to and right after a loss he/she is probably feeling the most vulnerable. 6) Be loving, NOT withholding – Your most important move when your child fails is to remain unconditionally loving. Do NOT link your love and their lovability with their performance. Do NOT withhold your love whenever they fail. Instead, reassure them both verbally and non-verbally that you'll love them no matter what happens in their performance! Remember, our kids need our love more when the going gets rough. Be there for them unconditionally! 7) Be disappointed WITH them, NOT disappointed IN them – This goes back to your primary job of keeping your child's feelings of failure foremost in your mind. When they fail, empathize with their disappointment. Feel their disappointment and reflect back to them that you understand how their disappointment feels. "You know, right now I can imagine how awful it must feel to have come so close and then right at the end, come up short. I know you're really disappointed. It's tough to lose and it sure hurts like hell." Under no circumstances should you show that YOU are disappointed in them. Remember, they are NOT performing in their sport for YOU. The sport belongs to them. They should be performing for themselves! If they fail, do NOT make their failure about YOU and YOUR disappointment.

To sum, if you truly want to teach your kids how to have a healthy attitude about failing and making mistakes, then you need to learn how to better manage their feelings when they fail. Paradoxically, in order to do this well, you need to learn how to first manage your own feelings when they fail so that these do not get in your way of lovingly be there for your child

# The Part that Character Plays in Success!

By Hobie Billingsley

It is possible to score about 900 points for a male 3-meter diver and about 750 points for a female 3-meter diver.

The ability to achieve such a score requires:

1. The inherited strength and athletic ability.
2. An excellent training program
3. The four mental strength requirements for success: Honesty, unselfishness, self-discipline and ambition and as well
4. A person's self-esteem level is essential.

A mathematical expression of the score for an individual might be:

$$S = I^2 \times T \times (H + U + D + A) \times E \times MS$$

I = inherited potential %

H, U, D, A, expressed as percents: (Honesty, Unselfishness, Discipline, Ambition)

T = Training potential %

E = Self esteem %

MS = Maximum score 900 or 750

A person with 95% of the physical inherited potential and 95% of the facilities and coaching needed and 70% of the H, U, D, & A possible should have a score equal to 60% of the maximum for their event or 540 points for a male and 450 points for a female on 3 meter. This is with 100% self-esteem.

It would be difficult to improve the training facilities and impossible to change the inherited potential but a diver who improves his or her honesty, unselfishness, self discipline and ambition by 20 % could go to 718 for a male and 600 for a female. Of course some people may be higher or lower in each of these mental strength categories and if you are already at 90 % then it is very difficult to improve. Therefore the areas, which you are lowest in, will give you the greatest room for improvement.

The most common problem is performing well under various types of

stresses. Stress can be considered anything that resists what we are trying to do. Much as if someone or thing were pushing us backward we must then push forward with a greater force or effort.

Then there is stress endurance or the ability to deal with stress for a long period of time. If we do not have a high enough strength of mind or stress endurance than we will not be able to move continually forward and will stop at the same score for a long period of time. If we do not do exercises to strengthen our minds that score will be as good as we can get.

What kind of exercises can we do? Of course the most specific exercises are in the diving training and competing. Diving tired, scared, nervous at meets, sick, pressure to win, etc. so while we train our bodies we train our minds. However we only train 30 hours out of 168 hours each week. Therefore we can work on our mental strengths in the 68 hours we are not asleep or training. Here is how this can occur.

Honesty includes exaggeration, rationalization, procrastination, omission, not honoring a commitment, forgetting, escaping, etc. On a daily basis we must examine what we say to reduce the tendency towards saying or doing the easy thing. Being honest makes us mentally stronger and more logical.

Honesty equals facts. Facts equal logic and logical decisions.

As an on going series of exercises to improve our honesty we must examine what we say. For example we might say there was a thousand of something we should correct our self after reflecting and do a better count and say about 750. This is precision and honesty. By constantly putting effort into being honest we become stronger mentally. As well when we are honest it forces us to be disciplined enough to live up to our commitment when asked to account for whether we have carried something out.

Self Discipline The U.S. Marines train people to handle the pressure of possibly being killed. (G. I. Jane). This same kind of training is needed to be able to handle high intensity stresses as well as enduring long periods of stress without losing our focus and continuing to be able to make logical decisions. Honesty (logic) and discipline give us precision, which is the ability to do what we have to do exactly when we have to (Such as the hardest dive in the biggest meet of your life.)

As we know discipline is mainly learned in training but must be practiced everywhere in order to become stronger. For example. A) Always be 15 minutes early for every thing. B) Pick the first thing that has to be done at

home that you hate doing and always do it within 1 minute of noticing it. ie. The dishes, making your bed.

When you can do this perfectly, make it 2 items.

C) Make a list of things you have to do away from the pool and never miss one item. ie. Take pills, stretch, visualize etc. D) When in training do all of the things you know the coach wants before being asked, right to the last detail. If asked to do something that you don't want to, or don't think is necessary do it without complaint and gain in mental strength. If you ask the coach and he gives you an explanation you will be more motivated to do it, which is good educationally, but now that you are motivated you are not exercising your self-discipline.

Motivation gets you going. Discipline keeps you going!

When the coach gives you a task or says something, which could upset you, this is a challenge for you to learn to discipline yourself and control your emotions so that you can stay focused under stress. The coach will periodically, deliberately do this as part of training. If you refuse to accept this part of training you will fail at the high stress/ high performance level.

Unselfishness (Or generosity.) Doing things for others takes extra care and discipline and pays off in a good social environment, such as working with people who like you and want to help. Nobody wants to help somebody who thinks everything is about them. Being unselfish with no recognition or return favor is hard but it builds character. People who have empathy and care for others will learn to care for themselves in the future using the same consideration for what is best for the "future you" as compared to instant gratification for the "present you".

If you are diving for yourself you have nobody to let down but yourself when you stay up late or don't stretch. But if you are diving for someone or thing more important than you, then if you are unselfish you will not let them down. For example if you're diving for your mother or sick brother, for God or for your country or to set a good example for young people, you will be much more successful and admired if you don't think it is all about you!

Ambition requires setting major goals and intermediate sub goals with time lines. Ambition also means working hard in preparation for these goals.

Ambition is the opposite of laziness and requires belief in ones ability to be successful in achieving your goals. Ambition is of no value without honesty, unselfishness and discipline otherwise all the training can be wasted.

Ambition is synonymous with desire and motivation.

Self Esteem is the average of all your self-confidences especially in the following areas.

- A) Your intelligence and education
- B) Your appearance
- C) Whether you are a good person
- D) Your social acceptance
- E) Your athletic ability

Someone with high self-esteem has high self-confidence in themselves in all areas and will not feel inferior to others or to a task in which they have confidence. People with extremely low self-esteem will not believe that they can do difficult things or even apparently easy things in worst cases. Even though others know that they should be able to. This is especially true under pressure of loss or injury.

People with low self-esteem cannot accept criticism as it tends to lower their already low self-esteem and reaffirms their self-doubt. Because of this they cannot accept that they make mistakes and they avoid dealing with these situations by becoming angry or by quitting.

People with high self-esteem accept criticism and examine it, discard it if it is not valid and try to improve if it is valid. If they make a mistake, they examine how to avoid making this or other related errors again. To improve ones self-esteem we must accept our faults, change them and feel good that we are a better person.

# What Diving Parents Should Know

By Joe Chirico, Head Coach Boston Area Diving

The sport of diving is safe, fun and exciting. More than 20 million children participate in organized sports, but only a few thousand of the most talented athletes will become divers.

Many young divers dream of the making it to the Olympic Games, others dream of making their high school teams or getting a college scholarship. No matter what size a child's dream, it is important that the dream is their dream. Parents should nurture these dreams and help them come true.

Being a "diving parent" is just one more facet in the challenging job of being a parent. The goal of this booklet is to provide some pointers. Every situation is different, so you should use your best judgment.

Through Diving your Child can Acquire

- Improved athletic and motor skills;
- A positive self-image;
- Improved social skills from interacting with teammates and coach;
- An ability to deal with success and disappointments;
- Sportsmanship and leadership skills;
- A chance to travel, visit new places and make new friends.

What is United States Diving?

United States Diving Inc. (USD) is the national governing body of diving, the successor to the Amateur Athletic Union. USD is an independent, not-for-profit corporation formed to promote and improve diving in the United States. Your local association (i.e.. Pacific, Florida, New England) is a subsidiary member. All athletes participating on a U.S. Diving team must register with USD. The annual membership runs from January 1st through December 31st. Currently, Novice level athletes pay a \$50 membership fee; Junior Olympic and Senior level athletes pay a \$75 fee. Athletes registered with USD automatically receive secondary accident insurance for all supervised practices and sanctioned events. The coverage currently pays up to \$25,000 per accident with a \$250 deductible. The insurance coverage is secondary, meaning it takes effect only if your primary insurance runs out.

Diving Safety

Many parents express concerns about the safety of diving. However, for an athlete who is properly trained by a safety certified coach, diving is an

extremely safe sport. "Diving Safety, A Position Paper" published by United States Diving reports on a study conducted by the Consumer Product Safety Commission which found that there were fewer accidents related to diving and diving boards than to golf, bowling or bleachers. A second study conducted by the National Spinal Cord Injury Data Research Center found that half of all diving injuries occurred in rivers, lakes and oceans and that most diving injuries "result from horseplay and injudicious behavior." As Olympic Coach Ron O'Brien has explained: The sport of diving has suffered a poor image through association with accidents involving a dive into water, but having no connection to the sport of diving itself. These accidents occur in the shallow end of the pool, not the deep end, and they usually involve people who are not divers, have received little instruction and whose activities are not properly supervised.

#### A Diving Parents' Responsibilities

- Make sure the diver is at practice on time and ready to dive. Siblings and career obligations often make this difficult. Car pools with teammates are often the best solution.
- Encourage your child without pressuring them. Always show interest and enthusiasm.
- Try not to coach your child. During practices and meets, allow the coaches to do their job. Some coaches find that divers perform better and more effectively when parents are not present or are seated further away.
- If your child misbehaves, a coach has some responsibility to discipline them, but the ultimate responsibility for discipline remains with the parent.
- Do not criticize coaches, officials or other divers in front of your child.
- Let your child know that you will be there for them, even if a practice or competition does not go as well as hoped or anticipated.
- When asked, help out with team or meet activities. When at a meet hosted by another team, remember to thank coaches, officials and other meet volunteers. Putting on a meet is a tough job; expressions of appreciation are always welcome.

#### How To Prepare Your Child For A Competition

- Most divers do not need a pep talk from their parents before a meet. Divers usually get excited about competing, and do not need to get "fired up." Let the coach set the mood and the tone.
- If your child seems nervous, help him or her to focus on their goals. Always be positive with your encouragement and comments.
- Diving is a sport that is better performed when the athlete is relaxed. To reduce stress, it is important that the diver's self esteem (or the

parents') does not depend on the outcome of a meet or the performance of a particular dive. It is important to remember that a poor performance at a competition is not a negative reflection on the diver or the parent. Win or lose, a diver must know that he or she has his or her parents support and approval.

#### How To Handle A Poor Performance

It is impossible for an athlete to give a top performance at every meet. Dealing with disappointment can be much more difficult than dealing with success. A parent should focus on some aspect of the competition that went well.

Examples include performing a new dive for the first time in competition, or visible improvements such as a better toe point or higher jump. Allow your diver to be disappointed before trying to cheer them up. A diver needs to know that they can fail and still be supported. Then focus on up-coming events.

Try not to say the following:

- Oh, it's not that important.
- If only you had...
- Why did you balk?
- We pay a lot for you to train, and this is all we get?
- It wasn't your fault, it was the judging.
- If only the coach let you do another dive.

#### Proper Eating

For good practices and meets, it is important that the diver eat well. Many divers have trouble eating before the meet, but they should eat something. If a diver runs out of fuel in the middle of a meet, it is too late to do anything about it. Complex carbohydrates such as apples, yogurt, pancakes, pasta and whole grain breads are ideal pre-meet foods. Before practices and competitions, divers should avoid foods high in fat such as hamburgers, french fries and sausage.

#### What Age Group Is My Child In?

Competition levels are divided into the following age groups: 9 & under, 10-11, 12-13, 14-15 and 16-18. A diver's age as of the last day of the meet determines the age group for that meet. Thus, if your child turns 14 on the last day of a three-day meet, your child will compete in the 14-15 age group for that entire meet.

#### Communicating with the Coach

A diving coach can have a positive and long-lasting relationship with your child. He or she can help a diver to perform well and make diving a pleasant experience for your child. As a parent, you may find it difficult to approach a coach with a question or a concern. Remember, you and the coach are

working together in the best interest of your child, and you should feel comfortable discussing with the coach any issue that affects your child. The best time to approach a coach is before or after a practice or a meet, not during the event. It is helpful to remember that a coach is most likely concerned with long-term goals and may have a different perspective than the parent. Also, remember that a coach is concerned with the best interests of the team, as well as those of your individual child.

A misunderstanding or miscommunication should be addressed early on before it turns into a more serious problem. Approach the coach with your concern and listen to the coach's explanation. Some misunderstandings may be a miscommunication on the part of the child. Occasionally a parent may want to remove a child from the sport due to an unpleasant experience. Before making any abrupt moves, a parent should talk to the coach to see if a less drastic step may improve the situation.

Working together, parents and coaches can create a positive atmosphere for a diver. Please remember, it is the parents' job to support the diver and the program, and the coach's job to coach. Diving Meets – Everything You Need To Know. The following suggestions are geared to help you through your first few diving meets. These are general rules. You should always check with your coach to find out specifically what he or she expects of divers and their parents.

Before the Meet Starts...

- Make sure your child gets a good night's sleep and a healthy meal prior to the competition.
- Be sure that you know what time the coach expects you at the pool. Give yourself plenty of traveling time so that your child will arrive at the pool before the scheduled warm-up begins. It's better to be safe than sorry.
- If the meet is an "away" meet, make sure the coach knows where you are staying so that he or she may get in touch with you if needed.
- Check with the coach before leaving for the meet to learn if your child should sit in the bleachers with you or report to the deck. Some teams sit together on the deck, so look for familiar faces.
- United States Diving insurance regulations do not allow parents on deck unless they are serving in an official capacity (i.e., working the scoring table).
- Have your child contact his/her coach so that they know you have arrived. Follow the coach's instructions on what to do next. It is important to remember that coaches are generally very busy at meets, but will spend time with each child when it counts the most – during

their warm-up and during their event. • Find the registration table. If your child is registered, check in and pick up a diving sheet(s). If your child is not registered, you should pay the registration fee, fill out all appropriate entry forms and releases, and pick up a diving sheet(s). • Diving sheets describe what dives your child will be doing and in what order. They are used by the announcer and the scoring table to record scores. If your child has never before filled out a diving sheet, and does not know how to do it, check with the coach. Sometimes, a more experienced diver from your team will be available to help your child. Some coaches recommend filling out a practice sheet the week before the meet and reviewing it together. • Once diving sheets are filled out, turn them in at the appropriate place (usually the registration table or look for large envelopes hanging on the wall).

### The Competition

It is important for every diver to know when their event begins, and at what time the coach expects them to be ready to compete.

Once the event has begun, the diver should know their order in the event, and always be prepared to dive when their name is called. Usually, the announcer will call the current diver and the “on-deck” diver (the next diver in the order). All questions concerning a judge’s call, the conduct of a meet, or the meet results should be directed to the coach. The coach will pursue the matter through the proper channels.

If you are looking for something to do, check with the parents’ organization running the meet. You may be able to help in some way, such as working at the scoring table, or you may want to bring a good book or some work from home

### After the Event, A Parent May Want To

- Make sure the child is available for any award ceremonies if applicable. • Tell your child what a great job they did and how proud of them you are. • Help them to relax if they are preparing to dive in a second event. • Make sure they are eating and/or drinking the proper foods. • Once the diver has finished competing, check with the coach before leaving (to find out about the next practice or warm-up times for any upcoming events).

### What To Take To The Meet

- Bathing suits – one for warm-up and one for competition. • A sammy or chamois towel, so that the diver may dry off in between dives. • Towels -your diver will be there for awhile, so pack at least two. • Team outfit. • Sweat suit

or terry cloth bath robe. • Playing cards, walk-man, games – diver may have some free time between events. • Food – don't count on the snack bar at the meet to provide nutritious foods. A cooler with healthy food such as fruit, yogurt, granola bars and juice is usually a better choice. • For you – a book or some work from home. You'll have some free time in between warm-ups and events. • Remember, pools are usually very warm and humid. Therefore, you need to make sure you dress appropriately – layers are recommended. In Closing, being a diving parent has many rewards, but it is not always easy. This booklet was designed to help make your role as a diving parent a little more straightforward. This is only a starting point. We hope it is useful

## 6 Keys to Diving in the Zone

Dr. Alan Goldberg

You look for your score when it's all over and can't believe your eyes. Even though you're surprised, you somehow knew this was going to be a great dive right from the moment that you climbed onto the board for your very first dive. All of your dives had that very special feel that seems to come around all too infrequently. Maybe it was the sense you had just before each dive of being in your own little world, aware of everything and everyone around you, yet strangely oblivious to it all. It was as if you had "concentration blinders" on and all that you could see or hear was what you were doing and nothing else. Maybe it was that calm, that confidence that seemed to settle over you just before the meet even began. Your old friend fear was nowhere to be found. Perhaps it was a strange combination of feeling both loose and excited at the same time that enveloped you just before you took off on that first dive. On the board you felt calm and focused. There was an easy strength and energy that seemed to flow through your muscles. Your takeoff felt strong and powerful. Dare you say perfect! You went up high over the board, your above board mechanics were strong clean. Your timing was exquisite, over and over again. You ripped your entries. There was an almost eerie connection between your mind and body. It was as if you could simply mentally rehearse the dive before you went and, almost instantaneously, with your takeoff, you perfectly reproduced those images with the actual dive! Even if you were slightly off on one dive, it seemed to have no significant impact on you. Nothing could shake your confidence and focus. It was as if your mind and

body meshed perfectly for this meet. You were effortless effort. Poetry in motion. The gods of peak performance were smiling brightly down upon you. It's that one meet that makes all the sacrifices, pain, fear, frustration and hard work that you regularly endure worth while. You were diving in that zone! If only you could prepackage those feelings and that performance state so that you had it at your fingertips whenever you wanted!

Maybe you've had the frustrating experience of diving in the zone one day and enthusiastically looking forward to your next meet or practice so that you could get up on that board and do it all again. Unfortunately, this session your timing is way off, you feel tentative and even fearful, and the only thing that you do again is crash! Or perhaps you found yourself in the zone for the first few dives of the meet, flying high until one or two bad dives sent you hurtling down to earth and crashing as the meet progressed. There's nothing more elusive in diving than finding the doorway to the zone and keeping yourself in it when the chips are on the line. While there's no guaranteed formula for consistently unlocking the zone's power, following these six guidelines will significantly increase your chances of opening up that doorway to peak performance for those big meets:

**1. Understanding That Your Pre-dive Thoughts Directly Affect How Well You Dive.** Pre-dive thoughts go directly into your body, changing your rate and depth of breathing, level of muscle tension, heart and pulse rate, all of which have a profound effect on your endurance, takeoff, aboveboard mechanics, timing and the smoothness of your entry. Frequently, dives are ripped or crashed before the athlete even climbs up to the board, so be aware of the quality of your self-talk. Remember the mental principle of G.I.G.O., garbage in, garbage out. If you think "garbage" thoughts before and during your dives, your performance will begin to "smell" like garbage! Discipline yourself to monitor the negativity that's a normal part of competition and replace it with more positive, performance enhancing thoughts. This may not be easy in the beginning, especially if you've gotten into the habit of being negative. Be persistent and don't allow the negativity to get much airtime.

**2. Keep Your Focus of Concentration In The Meet And On Each Dive, Not In Your Head.** When you dive in the zone, you are not thinking, you are simply doing. You are in the experience, not in your head. This means that

you may be concentrating on the feel of the dive, your arm tuck, legs or entry, or you may be focusing on a spot outside yourself that you use as a signal to help you come out of the dive. When you think, you will always get yourself into trouble. Thinking tightens up your muscles and clouds your vision. It will erode your confidence and feed your fears. You can't think yourself into the zone. Instead, you have to be in the experience of the meet and into each dive. Before you dive, find things in your pre-dive ritual (arm movements, deep breath, pre-dive images, self talk, etc.) that you can keep bringing your focus back to so that you'll stay in the experience instead of in your head.

**3. Stay Inside Yourself And Dive Your Opponents' Dives.** One of the biggest mental mistakes made by divers that prevents them from ever reaching the zone is focusing too much on what's going on around them, especially on how their opponents are diving. When you dive your best, you are centered and throwing your own dives. This may sound sort of silly because whose dives can you really throw anyway? But all too often a diver gets preoccupied with the competition and what they are doing. You can't be worried about your opponent's size, record, degree of difficulty of their dives, reputation or hairstyle if you're going to dive in the zone. Everything about your opponent, including how much the gods of luck are shining down on him or her that day, are all "uncontrollables." A pre- or during meet focus on uncontrollables will raise your stress level, kill your confidence and will never help you perform to your potential. To get to the zone, you must first be aware when your focus of concentration leaves your dives and then quickly return it to what you're doing. Don't try to dive someone else's list. Do what you do the best. Stay centered by keeping your mind on you.

**4. Have Fun!** In any sport, peak performance is a direct result of having fun. The more you enjoy the meet and the competitive struggle, the looser you'll be mentally and physically and the better you'll dive. If you make one dive or a meet too important, you'll choke the fun right out of yourself and end up crashing big time. Putting your ego on the line when you compete is one way to drain the enjoyment out of the meet. If you dive well, you're a better person than if you dive badly, you start to think. You can't wait until after you've won the meet to have fun. This is backwards. You must have fun first, before you dive, in order to perform your best. Fun (passion) is one of the key passwords that will get you into the zone. Without it, you'll find the door to the zone

slammed in your face. Remember what you love about diving and try to stay in touch with this when you compete, especially in those bigger meets!

**5. Trust And Let It Happen.** When you dive in the zone, you're powered by effortless effort. You dive smoothly and consistently without trying too hard. Your peak performances come from a "letting it happen" mind set. You can't force a good dive out of your body any more than you can force yourself to sleep at night. Willing yourself through a perfect reverse and a half will only tighten your muscles up and cause you to dive with uncanny inaccuracy. To dive your very best, you have to mentally step back, trust your hours of practice and experience and just let that great dive come out. A pre-meet reminder that you've "paid your dues," know what to do and are ready will go a long way towards helping you perform your best. Trusting and letting it happen means that you must stay calm and relaxed. The more relaxed that you are, the easier that it will be for you to rip your dives.

**6. Dive In The "Now".** When you are in the zone, your focus of concentration is naturally in the "now." This means that you are paying attention to what is going on in the moment rather than worried about things in the past or what's going to happen in the future. A past or future performance focus will block your path to the zone. As a diver, the only "time zone" that you really have control over and power in is the "now." When you find yourself slipping out of the proper "now" focus and thinking about a botched dive (past) or moving ahead to worry about a more difficult one later on in the list (future), your job is to quickly bring yourself mentally back to the now and the dive you are about to do. Diving in the zone is all about focusing on one dive at a time in the now.

## Failing, a Secret of Success?

Dr. Alan Goldberg

Want to become a champion? Want to know the one biggest secret to success in and out of sports? Want to know what really separates winners from losers in every sport?

The secret to your athletic success is very simple! If you truly want to reach your athletic dreams the one thing you have to learn to do better than most everyone else is....fail! Fail??? That's right! I said, "fail!" Failure is the secret, master key to unlocking the doors to all of your athletic dreams. I know...You think I'm nuts right? Perhaps Dr. G has spent too much time out in the hot summer sun. Failure is suppose to be this terrible thing that you want to avoid at all costs. This nasty, humiliating occurrence that destroys lives and kills motivation, right? Wrong!! Failure is not as bad as you think!

Understand this. You can't get better as an athlete unless you're willing to fail enough! Why? Because failures, mistakes and losses provide you with a valuable source of feedback. They tell you what you did wrong and what not to do next time. In this way failures highlight your weaknesses. What's so wonderful about that? Simple! You can't get better, faster, stronger or more skilled in your sport without knowing your shortcomings. Remember, a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Every time that you fail, lose or mess up, you have an opportunity, if you're smart enough to recognize it, to lift the level of your training.

There are two general ways that athletes deal with setbacks and failure. The most common one is also the wrong way! That is, using failure as evidence that you're inadequate, weak, "no good", etc. Athletes who do this use their failures to emotionally beat themselves up. This is the athlete who throws his equipment in disgust after the game or the tennis player who loses a match and says to himself, "You idiot! You suck! You have no game! My grandmother could've beaten you today." When you use your mistakes and losses in this way you will not help your training. This kind of self-abuse only serves to kill your confidence, undercut your motivation and interfere with your performance.

The second way of dealing with failure is the one used by champions. To them, failure is nothing more than what you have to do to get there. Failure and losses provide the answers to the success puzzle. They tell you exactly

what you did wrong and therefore what you need to work on to improve. In this way, mistakes and failure supply you with that all-important feedback to take you to the next level.

To master anything new, you must start out at the bottom, as a beginner. Beginners can only learn by making mistakes and figuring out through these mistakes what not to do the next time in order to get it right. If you give yourself too much of a hard time when you fail, then you'll be more reluctant to take the risks necessary to get you to your goals. Remember Nike's old ad with Michael Jordan talking about all his failures, all the last second shots with the game on the line that he missed, the times he cost his team the game, the time he was cut from his high school basketball squad. The commercial ends with MJ saying, "And it's because of all these setbacks and failures that I'm so successful today."

I was the number one singles tennis player for my college and twice Conference Champion. How I got to this level of excellence is quite simple. I had to lose a lot of matches. I had to collect a lot of disappointments. I had to learn to tolerate a tremendous amount of frustration. With every failure I improved just a little more. I built my tennis success on each of my failures and you can too! I learned to speak in front of groups the same way. I started off as awful and got good by messing up a whole lot.

Am I telling you that you have to like failing? No Way! Am I telling you that mediocrity is OK? Never! I have never met a champion who liked failing. I have never met a consistent winner who was ever satisfied with a half-hearted effort. Winners' hate failing with a passion. However, they are smart enough to know that failing is an important part of the process. It's what you have to do to get to success.

One final key point about failing and performance. If you are worried about losing or messing up, then chances are good that you will perform badly. You will always do your best when you have absolutely nothing to lose. Athletes always choke when they get too focused on the outcome. Forget failing. It's not the end of the world! Stop tying your ego up with the outcome of your game, match or race. Failure is not your enemy! Instead, failure is a very important training partner! Losing is nothing more than feedback. Open your eyes and ears and treat your setbacks this way. Learn from them! Don't dwell on them! Then forget them!

Remember...Failure is feedback and feedback is the breakfast of champions!

# Helping the Blocked Diver

Dr. Alan Goldberg

When a diver is blocked he or she very quickly loses a perspective about what is and isn't possible. The fears and frustrations that are normal parts of the learning process begin to get blown out of proportion and soon the diver has developed tunnel vision which is focused only on the performance difficulty. With confidence fading away, words like can't, never and impossible are used by the diver to describe the dive and their ability. Since belief is one of the most powerful determining factors in performance, divers are limited most by what they believe is possible. It is frequently crucial for the coach to intervene at this level to challenge some of the faulty beliefs that get built up around the block. Unless you can change your diver's belief system and what they think they can do, your other interventions will only lead to frustrations. Telling a diver that they have nothing to be afraid of, or that all they have to do is believe in themselves will not work. Instead, try the following:

- 1) Help the diver get in touch with other blocks or "impossibles" that they have successfully overcome. Every diver has to face their fears over and over again as they progress in the sport. Have your diver remember, in specific detail, other obstacles they have overcome or dives they have mastered.
- 2) By-pass conscious resistance by the deliberate use of a metaphor or story telling. Because conscious fears and anxieties are so powerful, several well-designed stories (true or false) of other divers who overcame similar self-limiting beliefs will frequently serve as a catalyst to get the athlete unstuck. For instance, I like to tell my athletes the story of the "5 minute miler" a high school senior who was so named because he ran his first five races of his senior year between 5:01 and 5:06. He didn't believe he could possibly break five minutes. In his sixth race, he ran a 5:02, and the coach ran out to the track and excitedly yelled "John, you did it, 4:59; you finally broke the barrier." The coach had arranged with the opposing coach to fudge the actual time. After this, the runner consistently broke five minutes. Such a story, as it is interpreted by an athlete, will cause them to begin to see that beliefs and barriers are self-imposed.

# Your Brain and Your Game

By Dr. Alan Goldberg

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by Dr. Alan Goldberg

SPECIAL ISSUE: YOUR BRAIN AND YOUR GAME – Brain functioning and athletic performance for dummies

Tony had been dogged and harassed by an overly physical defender almost the entire match. This kid had been elbowing him, pulling at his jersey, kicking him, talking trash and doing just about everything he could whenever the refs weren't looking to knock Tony off his game and get inside his head.

Apparently his slightly underhanded efforts had been paying off. Tony's play was indeed way off. He was rushing, forcing things, turning the ball over and clearly distracted by his opponent. Tony had gotten progressively more frustrated and angry throughout the course of the game and his simmering feelings finally boiled over on one play when he was tackled hard by this kid and the refs let the game continue. The "no-call" made Tony that much more furious and the next time he got the ball back, he immediately and a bit too obviously knocked this same opponent hard to the ground as he went past him. Unfortunately the refs caught him retaliating and gave him a yellow card along with a stern verbal warning. The fact that he had been caught this one time while his opponent had been getting away with much worse the entire game made Tony that much angrier.

He couldn't stop his mind from racing. His normally relaxed and even style of play had vanished and been replaced by an anxious, pressured sense of urgency. His mind kept reviewing all the "facts." This was a must-win game for his team if they had any hopes of making the post-season tournament. If they lost, the season would be over and he didn't want to end his high school career on this sour note. Tony was his team's leading scorer and one of their better players, yet he'd been virtually handcuffed the entire game, getting off only one shot and even that one hadn't been a very good one. He'd been playing badly and he couldn't stop his mind from reviewing all his blown chances and "bonehead" plays. It was up to him to score and score quickly if he was to keep his team in the game. The internal pressure to make

something happen just seemed to build up inside of him as the minutes ticked away.

This was not the first time that Tony had struggled in these kinds of high-pressured situations. There had been a few really important tryouts and big games where Tony's mind had gotten the best of him and, as a result his game had quickly gone south. He had gotten too nervous in each of these situations because he couldn't seem to stop his thoughts from racing over all of the wrong things. As a consequence, he'd ended up playing poorly and even choking. I guess maybe that's what had been happening in this match. Even before his opponent had started harassing him he'd gone into the game with a flood of thoughts and experiencing too much pressure. He felt like he had to have a great game for his team to have a decent chance at qualifying for the conference tourney. In Tony's mind, if they lost, then it would be completely his fault, plain and simple! Perhaps his over-thinking and the resultant tightness could explain why Tony had been so vulnerable to his opponent's overly aggressive and harassing style of defense.

With less than two minutes left in regulation and his team down one – nil, Tony finally forced his way past this defender near the top of the box. He now had that one opportunity he'd been waiting for all game, a clean shot. If he could just score here, this would tie the game and send it into overtime. Then the momentum would be with his team and they could come out in the sudden-death period and get the job done. Just as Tony went for the shot, he was tackled hard from behind by another defender who had moved up in an attempt to double team him. It wasn't a clean tackle. The ref signaled a foul and free kick. FINALLY they got one right!!! This was it! He had the game tying goal on his boot and he was going to make it count. YESSSSS!!!

However, as Tony set up to take this very make-able kick, all was not right in his head. Despite the fact that he told himself he wanted to be in this situation, he was suddenly feeling a bit too nervous and shaky. He couldn't slow himself down enough to properly focus as his mind began racing through all the potential consequences of this kick. "I could tie the game and then we could then win in OT and get into the tournament...or I could choke. Oh, My God! What if I miss it? If I blow it, how will I ever live this down? What will the coach say? I know my teammates will be totally let down if I miss. That would be so embarrassing." The more he tried to reassure himself that he was confident and could make the kick, the faster his mind raced and the more

nervous he got. Suddenly past situations of failure and embarrassment rolled through his head like a negative highlight reel crowding out his initial excitement and the last shreds of confidence that he had felt just seconds before. He wished he didn't have to take the kick and someone else could step in and bail him out. He wanted to just escape. His arms and legs felt like lead. He had no feeling whatsoever in his feet. Tony knew that he was in serious trouble, but he felt totally helpless to be able to do anything to change it.

This was his worst nightmare. Here he was in front of all these people who were depending upon him and he was about to completely humiliate himself. He was so nervous it made it hard for him to catch his breath. He was a little too positive that he was going to miss this kick. The goal might as well have been at the complete far side of the field given how he was feeling. He desperately tried to pull himself together by slowing his breathing down but his chest felt tight and constricted. He started coaching himself to calm down and focus. Then he tried to add instructions on the mechanics of a good strike, how to approach the ball, how to shift his weight, what angle to hit the ball from and most important, where he needed that ball to go. He thought about the keeper's tendencies and tried to guess which side he might go to. The goal mouth seemed to be getting smaller and smaller. There was just far too much noise going on in his head. As he got ready to strike the ball he noticed that he had been holding his breath and that he suddenly had a bad headache. The instant his foot struck the ball he knew that the shot was way off base and his fears had come to pass. He had completely distracted himself with his over thinking and as a result, his foot got under the ball too much and sent it sailing harmlessly over the cross bar. He was a failure. He had blown it. He was beside himself. He threw himself down on the ground and started to sob. He couldn't control himself. As the final seconds of the game ticked away Tony was inconsolable. He kept asking himself over and over again, "Why did this have to happen? Why does this crap always happen to me?" "What's wrong with me?" "I'm too good a player to stink this badly. Or maybe I'm not!"

Let's briefly look at Tony's mental meltdown and see if we can shed some light on these kinds of puzzling repetitive performance problems. Is there something valuable that you can possibly learn from this athlete's psychological collapse that may help you the next time you're under pressure

and needing to come through in the clutch?

Why is it that on some days you can go out and perform absolutely brilliantly while on other days and for no apparent reason your game does a major disappearing act? One performance you feel “on” and soar with the eagles and the next one you’re totally “off” and gobbling with the turkeys. And why is it that sometimes and for no apparent reason you seem to slip into one of those major performance slumps that just won’t quit? Days, weeks and even months will go by and you just can’t seem to get yourself back on track. Or maybe you’re plagued by an annoying and repetitive performance problem that’s been driving you absolutely bananas and totally messing up that which was once so routine and effortless for you to do. Maybe you can’t putt anymore without your wrists badly breaking. Or you can’t make a simple and routine throw back to the pitcher or to first base. At one time you were able to do a back tuck in your sleep and now you can’t even get your body to go for them anymore. Perhaps you always seem to be holding back and tentative when it counts the most. Or maybe, like Tony, you tend to over-think under pressure. So what’s really causing all of this performance havoc? Could it be the weather? Perhaps it’s the alignment of the sun, moon and stars? Might these dramatic performance changes be due to the thinning of the ozone layer or global warming?

Let’s simplify a relatively complex problem here. The reasons that your game may come and go as if it had a will and a mind of its’ own can be explained by carefully examining that vast and uncharted territory between your ears.

That’s right! The major difference between your best and worst outings, between being totally “on” and “way, way off” is most often directly related to what’s going on in your head both before and during these particular performances. What do I mean by this? The part of your brain that you’re using when the competition starts will ultimately determine if your performance ends up in the penthouse or the outhouse. Let’s examine all of this with a very simple lesson in brain functioning.

As depicted in figure #1, there are three major parts of the human brain: From left to right they are the Front Brain, the Mid-Brain and the Hind Brain. Each part of the brain is responsible for controlling different functions in our lives. The Front Brain handles conscious THINKING. The Mid-Brain handles our EMOTIONS. The Hind Brain is responsible for “KNOWING.” The “knowing” that I’m referring to here has nothing to do with intellectual or book

knowledge. Instead it refers to the knowing that comes from experience. You know how to “read” because you’ve learned through experience. You know how to walk and this ability has also been honed by years of experience. Your ability to talk, ride a bicycle, throw a baseball, hit a serve in tennis, ski, ride a horse or perform any athletic movement are things that you learned through years of experience and thus all these behaviors are controlled by your hind brain.

For the purposes of our present discussion, we will only concern ourselves with the Front and Hind Brains. Let’s briefly look at how each of these parts of the brain process information and the impact that this processing has on the quality of your athletic performance.

The Front Brain processes information consciously using words and logic. That is, you are fully aware when this kind of processing is going on because you can hear yourself thinking. In fact it’s your Front Brain that you hear from before those big competitions. It’s the part of your brain that may focus you on the outcome, tell you that you need to win or entertain the “what if’s” (“What if you choke?” “What if you fail to qualify?” “What if you lose?”), right before or even during that big performance. It’s also the part of your brain that helps you plan your pre-game strategy. When you sit down and think about your strengths and weaknesses, your opponent’s tendencies and what tactics you need to use in order to increase your chances of a successful outcome you are using your Front Brain.

However, if your Front Brain were active in the middle of a particular performance, then you’d be aware of a running commentary going on in your head while you were playing. Front Brain processing is also analytical. That is, this part of your brain tends to break things down into their component parts, examining each in great detail. For example, if you pulled up for a jump shot at the top of the key, the Front Brain might attempt to provide you with real time information on how many seconds were left on the shot and game clocks, the position of the defenders around you as well as where your teammates were on the court and whether they were open, what the proper positioning should be in your body for good shot execution, what your forearm, elbow, wrist and fingers of your shooting arm need to be doing in order to get off a good shot, whether you were squared up or not, the kind of follow through that was necessary to sink this shot, what may have happened the last 5 shots you took, what the consequences would be for missing this

shot, how your coach may react to you if you miss, what the fans may think about you, along with any number of other related or unrelated thoughts. In addition, Front Brain processing is also judgmental. That is, while you're performing, this part of your brain is offering an on-going, potentially critical evaluation on how you're doing. What you as an athlete may actually hear inside your cranium are things like, "Well, that was wicked stupid Einstein!" or "That was great, keep it up!" or "I can't believe you just missed that! What's wrong with you!?" "You've got to be more aggressive...and you've got to move your feet more! Come on! You're not playing as well as you should be! Step it up!" Etc. Because the Front Brain processes information consciously, using words and logic in an analytical and critical fashion, the time that it takes to process information directly related to the performance situation is relatively long. Plus, because of the slowness of this processing modality, the Front Brain is significantly limited in terms of the complexity and amount of information that it can handle at any given time. That is, the Front Brain can only manage very small amounts of simple information in a linear, one-thing-after-another fashion.

In the way that it processes information, your Front Brain is like having a coach directly inside your head. This "inner coach" is continually chattering away, providing you with on-going instructions, warnings, tips on technique and strategy, statistics from past performances, judgments about your opponents and teammates and on-going evaluations about how you're doing. While some of this information may actually be useful way before and after you perform, the vast majority of the time your "inner coach" has terrible timing and presents all this conscious data when you really can't effectively use it, immediately before or during your actual performance.

The Hind Brain, on the other hand processes information unconsciously. That is, while your brain is processing things you are totally unaware that this is happening. For example, while you're walking down the street totally absorbed in a conversation with your best friend, your Hind Brain is safely negotiating the walking for you, insuring that you don't trip in a pothole, stumble off a curb or walk into a car. While all this processing is taking place, the only thing that you're aware of is the humorous and engaging story that your friend is relating to you.

Hind Brain processing utilizes images and feelings rather than words. The processing makes use of internal pictures and kinesthetic or muscle feelings

(muscle memory). Unlike the Front Brain, the Hind Brain does not break the information that it's processing into component parts. Instead it processes the whole of the experience. In addition, Hind Brain processing is nonjudgmental. The athlete does not evaluate him/herself during the performance when processing from this part of the brain regardless of what happens in the performance. Because the Hind Brain processes information unconsciously using images and kinesthetic feelings that encompass the entire gestalt (whole) of the performance, processing time is instantaneous. In fact, The Hind Brain is capable of processing large amounts of very complex information both simultaneously and instantaneously.

Let's examine our basketball example from a Hind Brain perspective. As you drove to the top of the key to pull up for that jump shot as time ticked down, your Hind Brain would unconsciously and instantaneously process everything that you needed to know and do in order to get a good shot off. The timing, location of defenders, body positioning and proper technique would all be unconsciously taken care of by this part of your brain. In fact, consciously you would not be thinking about what your body was or should be doing. Instead, your Hind Brain would simply insure that you were doing it effortlessly. Furthermore, your conscious mind would not be cluttered with internal chatter about past shots, the consequences for missing this shot, or the coach's or crowd's potential reactions. With the Hind Brain in charge, your conscious mind or Front Brain would be in an observing role and therefore relatively quiet.

When you compare and contrast these two parts of your brain it becomes readily obvious which one should be running the show while you're performing: The Hind Brain. Keep in mind, your Front Brain's conscious, analytical processing can not even begin to keep up with the complexity and speed of even the most simple of athletic movements. The fact of the matter is your Front Brain is just much too slow during performance to be useful. When you allow your Front Brain with its' conscious thinking to steer your performance ship, you will always end up in pieces on the rocks! Plain and simple, it is impossible to instinctively respond effectively and with perfect timing and execution in a performance situation when you are thinking. Thinking is just flat out hazardous to your performance health.

This is not to say that your Front Brain doesn't have any constructive purposes. On the contrary! Front Brain processing is critically important for

pre-performance planning. Your conscious, analytical mind is very helpful to you during the days and hours leading up to a big competition. It helps you adequately prepare and effectively strategize for the upcoming performance. It helps you break down your opponent's strengths and weaknesses in devising an effective plan of attack for the match or game. The Front Brain is also quite useful in helping you review a performance afterwards. It enables you to break down your performance into small pieces and take a closer look at what you did well and where you may have fallen short. This information is invaluable feedback that is absolutely necessary for you to then correct your mistakes for future competitions. In fact, without this kind of important post-competition analysis, you will never really be able to highlight your weaknesses and then take your game to the next level.

The key point that I want to keep hammering home here is very simple. During your very best performances your Front Brain's job is one of quiet observation. Occasionally this part of your brain may offer a very brief tidbit or two of information for fine-tuning of the performance, but only occasionally and only when absolutely necessary. Instead, the majority of the time when you play to your potential your Front Brain is just quietly observing what is going on while the back of your brain runs the show. Trouble will always arise when you allow this part of your brain to become more active and take over during the performance. The athlete who is in a slump, consistently chokes under pressure, or who struggles with a repetitive performance problem most often does so because she allows her conscious mind to have too active a part during the performance.

Here's a very simple way for you to understand the relationship between your Front and Hind Brains during performance: Think of your Front Brain or conscious mind as a very bad, totally uncoordinated and unskilled athlete, the kind of athlete who is typically said to have "two left feet." His timing is always off, her technique is stiff and awkward and he/she can never get the job done when it counts. In this way, your Front Brain is like a rank beginner who really knows almost nothing about the game that you may play so well. Watching your Front Brain guide your performance is like trying to sit through a really terrible movie. It won't be fun and it will definitely be very ugly! Remember, one of the main reasons that athletes struggle with slumps and repetitive performance problems is because they allow their Front Brain to "guide" them before and during their performances.

So the question readily arises. Why would any athlete in his/her right mind take guidance and coaching from someone who was totally incompetent and had absolutely no understanding or knowledge of your sport? Well the answer is obvious. If you were in your right mind, you wouldn't!

Your Hind Brain, on the other hand is a talented, seasoned professional. He/she is a highly skilled, graceful and powerful athlete with tons of experience. With exquisite timing and smooth technique, this part of you always come through in the clutch. Watching your Hind Brain run the show is a sight to behold and is immensely enjoyable. With its' perfect guidance, vast experience and wisdom, your Hind Brain could help you take your game to the next level if you allow it to. Is there any good reason why you wouldn't let this pro be your full-time coach?

#### PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR ATHLETES

So now you know that you want to "hire" your Hind Brain to run your performance show and your Front Brain to serve as both a pre-performance consultant to help you plan and strategize long before the competition and an after-match analyst to help you review your performance and ferret out your strengths and weaknesses. You've also been told that your conscious-thinking Front Brain needs to be a quiet observer during your performances in order for you to play to your potential. Does all of this sound good? You Betcha!! But exactly how are you supposed to make all of this happen? What can you do to be able to convince your conscious mind to shut down during the competition so that you can perform in relative peace and quiet? The following list of "DO'S & DON'TS" may help! These strategies will assist you to more consistently perform from the back of your brain and appropriately harness your Front Brain so that it does its' rightful job. To really make these mental tactics work for you, you need to spend time regularly practicing them.

#### KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FRONT & HIND BRAIN

##### FUNCTIONING

– In order to be able to consistently play from the back of your brain, you need to develop an awareness of how both your Front and Hind brains process information. This awareness will form your first line of defense by helping you notice when you're in the wrong part of your brain. Without an awareness of the conscious signs of Front Brain processing (i.e. thinking, instructing, criticizing, worrying, breaking your performance into small pieces-analyzing during the performance) you will always be doomed to continue functioning

from this part of your brain. Awareness gives you the beginnings of control because it lets you know that you need to switch from Front to Hind Brain functioning.

#### DON'T COACH/INSTRUCT YOURSELF DURING THE PERFORMANCE

– You will always play your very best when you're not thinking. If you are coaching yourself while your game, match or race is going on, then chances are pretty good that you'll mess yourself up. Keep in mind that your conscious instructions are far too slow in relation to the speed of the action to be of any real value to you during the competition. Instead, your "inner coaching" will distract you from the task at hand and throw you way off your game. Save the conscious coaching for practice. It has no useful place in competition. Instead, try to keep your focus of concentration on what you're doing in the moment.

#### DON'T EVALUATE YOURSELF DURING THE PERFORMANCE

- Keep in mind that the time for you to review your performance and evaluate how you did is after the competition is over. The very worst time for you to be feeding yourself criticism about your play is while the game or contest is still going on. An internal discussion about your mistakes, screw-ups or failures should NEVER be going on while you perform. Like during-game coaching, these inner judgments will only serve to make you nervous, distract you from the flow of the game and undermine your self-confidence. If you hear the inner criticism starting to flow, quickly change channels and bring yourself back to the action.

#### KEEP THINGS SIMPLE

– Remember, the quieter your conscious mind is, the better you'll perform. If you are going to consciously remind yourself of important strategy or mechanical considerations just prior to your performance be sure to keep these reminders short and sweet, as well as few and far between. Reminding yourself of one or two performance cues is fine. However, trying to cram in a lot of strategy or technique instructions into your cranium will simply overload your system, backfire on you and get you performing poorly. Remember this rule of thumb: LESS IS MORE!

#### TRUST YOUR TRAINING

– All the work that you've been doing all season long has helped program your muscle memory and your Hind Brain. When it's competition time, you want to remind yourself that it's all in there! You've paid your physical dues and, as a result, your body knows exactly what to do. Your reflexes have been

properly trained. This means that you want to trust your muscle memory, relax and just let the performance come out. Regardless of how big the competition or how important the performance, your job is to relax, give your conscious mind a “vacation” and let the game come to you.

#### FOCUS ON FEEL, NOT ON THINKING

– The language of the Hind Brain is feel or muscle memory. The language of the Front Brain is thinking. When it counts the most, you want your focus of concentration on the feel of what you’re doing, not on your thoughts about it. If you’re a swimmer this might mean that you focus on your rhythm or finish. If you’re a runner you might concentrate on your tempo and the feel of your arm swing. If you’re a tennis player you might concentrate on the feel of the ball on your strings. If you’re an equestrian you might focus on the feel of your torso in the proper position on the horse, your inner thighs and legs gripping her, your hands loose and relaxed on the reins and the feel of the animal under you.

#### STAY IN THE NOW

– One way that you keep your focus on feel is by concentrating on the NOW or what is happening right in the moment. When you perform from your back brain you do this automatically. When you think, you tend to mentally “time travel” back and forth between the past and the future. You can only play your best when your concentration is in the “now,” focused on one thing at a time as it develops. Athletes who struggle with repetitive performance problems are serious mental “time travelers,” continually allowing their focus to slip back to the past and to jump ahead to the future. Try to keep your focus of attention in the NOW on what you’re doing and every time that you become aware of losing that focus, of time traveling back to the past or ahead to the future, quickly return your focus to the NOW.

#### DON'T ENGAGE THE CONSCIOUS THINKING THAT MAY RUN THROUGH YOUR MIND

– Sometimes your conscious mind will be very active during a performance despite your best efforts in quieting it down. In these situations your job is to effortlessly allow these conscious thoughts to pass through your mind without actively engaging them. When negative, critical thoughts or otherwise intrusive thoughts come up you don’t want to fight with them or even try to change them into positives. Instead, you want to calmly and quickly refocus your attention in the moment a way from the thinking to the task at hand.

Practice allowing these thoughts to harmlessly pass through your mind and soon you'll find that they will have less and less of a negative impact on you.

#### PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR PARENTS

Probably the most important information that you can take with you our simple lesson in brain functioning is directly related to your pre-game and during game behavior as well as what you say to your child-athlete before, during and after his/her competitions. Before we get into this, let me first pretend that I'm a mind reader and make an assumption about you as a parent. Because you are taking the time to read this material, chances are pretty good that you have a significant investment in doing the right thing by your child-athlete. You care about his/her well-being and happiness and would like him/her to reach his/her potential as an athlete. So you're well meaning and your heart is in the right place. This is a very important start towards helping your child have a healthy and happy youth sports experience. To make sure this good start continues and goes even further, you have to be certain that you play the right role on the athlete-coach-parent team.

What's the right role? You should always be your child's "best fan." You should try to be unconditionally supportive and loving. That is, your love and support should never, ever be tied to the quality of your child's performance, i.e. loving them more when they win than when they lose. Equally as important as this support role, which you have on the team, is a critical non-role that you must "play," and play well. What is this non-role? Simple! You do NOT want to function as a coach to your child. (Assuming that your child is on a team that already has a different coach than you). You do NOT want to push your child to train the way a coach would. You do NOT want to make your child do extra conditioning the way a coach would. You do NOT want to criticize your child's efforts or technique during or after a game the way a coach would. You do NOT want to provide your child with pre-game strategy the way a coach would. You do NOT want to offer on-going and during-game technique suggestions, criticism for bad plays or let your frustration show at bonehead plays the way a coach would. In sum, YOU DO NOT WANT TO COACH!!!! As long as you have an investment in your child being happy, learning quickly and performing to his/her potential then you will NOT coach. Taking on this coaching role because you want to be "helpful" is where the vast majority of really good parents go really bad! In doing so, these parents inadvertently put a tremendous amount of pressure on their child and end up

contributing to that child's slowly growing dislike of the sport and later, his/her potential premature dropout.

Let's take little closer look at why your "helpful" pre-game advice and during-game comments actively contribute to your child's poor performances. Let's refer to our discussion on Front and Hind Brain functioning to better understand how all of this works.

When a father yells coaching instructions at his child from the sidelines during a game he is engaging that child's Front Brain and conscious thinking.

Instructions like, "Dribble more. Go around him to the left, not the right. Go left and then shoot! C'mon son, use your off-foot" activate that child's conscious mind and get the athlete thinking about what the father is saying and what he then needs to do in order to try to utilize dad's comments. Unfortunately, because the child is now thinking, and breaking his movements down into small technique pieces based on dad's instructions, he is no longer paying attention to the right cues that are happening in the moment, in the game on the field. As a result, not only will this player remain a step or two behind the action, but his conscious thinking will interfere with his smooth execution and critical decision making. The end result of all of this is that the athlete will then be taken further out of the game mentally and this will show in his physical play.

When a mother yells criticism at her daughter during a gymnastics meet and embellishes these critical remarks with facial expressions, postures and voice tones that let her child-athlete know that mom is indeed very unhappy with her performance, the girl's judgmental Front Brain gets further activated. She then begins to consciously evaluate her own performance and worry about the outcome. If she has another event immediately coming up, the gymnast will most likely be overly preoccupied with how well she'll do and whether mom will approve or not. This kind of Front Brain processing will then stress out the young gymnast, tighten her muscles, distract her from the proper focus and make a good performance impossible.

So what am I saying here? During game coaching or technique instructions and constructive criticism, no matter how well intentioned or valid it may be, will immediately push your child-athlete into Front Brain functioning and, as a result, set him/her up for failure. As I've said before, athletes who think while they perform are athletes who always perform far below their potential. I'm quite sure that as a parent you would never intentionally say or do anything

that had this kind of negative effect. Therefore it is imperative that you understand what you should say and do on the sidelines.

Your guidance should always be this. Do not say or do anything that will cause your child's conscious attention to shift away from the performance to you, your words or behaviors. Don't yell at or criticize your child's teammates or opponents before, during or after the competition. Don't criticize the coach. Don't yell at the refs just because you think they made a bad call. Remember, peak performance can only happen when the athlete is completely absorbed in the action, focused on what he/she is doing in the moment. It's only when the athlete is totally focused in this way, quiet inside and completely relaxed that his/her Hind Brain gets activated.

Instead, watch the contest. Cheer for good plays and great effort from both sides. Let your cheering and presence be part of the background. Enjoy being supportive and present for your child in this way. Remember, what you have to say and how you act while your child performs should NEVER be in the foreground during a game. The game is not about you. Fair or not, good or bad, both you and I have already had our chances in this youth sport thing. Whether we did well or not is now totally irrelevant. Now it's your child's turn and his/her performance needs to be completely separate from you.

On a similar vein, your child should NEVER be performing for you. He/she should not be playing to make you happy or proud. Your child's sport should be very simply all about your child. It should serve as a vehicle for him/her to have fun and learn new skills in a competitive arena. Your child should be primarily participating because it brings a smile to his/her face and makes him/her feel good inside. Your job is to help your son or daughter keep this distinction clean and give him/her permission to enjoy the sport for themselves without the confusion of your over-involvement.

#### PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR COACHES

Why is it vitally important that you as a coach have a basic understanding of how the human brain works in relation to performance? For the same reason that it's vitally important that you know which coaching interventions of yours work to get your athletes performing well and which ones backfire and sabotage your athletes' efforts. If you have a basic awareness of those things that work and those that don't, it will simply make you that much smarter and more effective as a coach.

Years ago when I first started coaching tennis, one mistake I consistently

made was to overload my athletes with too much technical information about what they were doing wrong. In my enthusiasm to get them playing better, I inadvertently contributed to them playing worse by pushing them into their Front Brains too close to competitions. The really funny thing at the time was that everything I was telling them was technically correct and represented changes that they ultimately needed to make in order to take their game to the next level. The problem was that my coaching was far too cerebral and lacked the important understanding that as an athlete prepares for and goes into a performance he/she needs to be in a completely different part of his/her brain where analytical, conscious thinking is at a minimum. I was erroneously operating from the school of coaching that the more information you provide your athletes and team with as they go into a performance the better prepared they'll be. As we've been discussing, there's a fine line between the right amount of conscious information and too much. This is especially true during the game, at halftime and during timeouts or whenever there's a break in the action. If you as a coach don't know how and where to draw this line, then you'll end up undermining all of your hard work and unknowingly setting your athletes up to fail.

To maximize your coaching effectiveness and increase the chances that your athletes will come through in the clutch follow these basic guidelines directly related to Front and Hind Brain functioning:

**DON'T INTRODUCE NEW MECHANICAL, TECHNICAL OR EVEN STRATEGIC CHANGES TOO CLOSE TO AN IMPORTANT PERFORMANCE** – Remember, the last thing you want your athletes doing when it counts the most is thinking. Therefore, when they go into an important competition, you want them on automatic, responding the way that they've been training their muscle memory to do over and over again in practice. New skills or strategy immediately introduced right before big games will not have had ample enough time to become part of the Hind Brain's KNOWING. The Hind Brain "knows" through repetition and experience. Therefore new tactics or skills that have not yet been integrated will trigger your athletes into their Front Brains, thinking too much about what they are doing. If you do decide to try to teach new things right before a performance, then make it very clear to your athletes that you do NOT care at all about the outcome and instead want them to concentrate on trying to execute the new skills/tactics.

**RIGHT BEFORE AND DURING GAMES ALWAYS KEEP YOUR**

**INSTRUCTIONS SIMPLE** – In peak performance the athlete’s conscious thinking Front Brain is in a quiet, observer’s role. As a coach you have to be very careful that you don’t overload your athletes with too much technical or tactical information. Therefore, what you do say to your team and athletes pre-game should be very simple and minimal. Use the “less is more” philosophy. The time to provide a lot of conscious information is in practice the weeks and days leading up to a big game, but NEVER right before and during that big game. So just pick out one or two things that you want your athletes to have in the back of their mind and then just let them play. It’s critically important to keep this in mind during the game, at half time and during time outs. Your time-outs should be used to first calm your players down and then focus them on one or two simple things and no more.

**KEEP DURING GAME CRITICISMS TO A MINIMUM** – Remember, judgments and evaluation are part of the language that your Front Brain speaks. If you are continually criticizing your players during a contest, pointing out each and every mistake that they make and everything that they need to do to correct them, then you will risk not only overloading them with too much conscious information, but triggering their own Front Brain judgments of themselves. When a player screws up quickly help her understand what she did wrong and what she needs to do to correct it, but even more quickly, help her get her focus back in the action of the game. Do NOT keep returning to the mistake with her or her teammates unless you would like your athletes to commit more errors. The time to work on game mistakes is in the next practice. Then you can harp on the mistakes as much as you’d like. In practice it is perfectly fine to engage your athlete’s Front Brain functioning of breaking down the performance and skills and figuring out everything that went wrong. Just don’t do that same thing when it counts the most.

**DURING GAMES, FOCUS YOUR PLAYERS ON WHAT YOU WANT THEM TO DO, NOT ON WHAT YOU DON’T WANT THEM TO DO** – Hind Brain processing makes use of images and muscle memory. By focusing your athletes on what you want them to do, you are properly programming their Hind Brains and you are far more likely to see the results that you desire. By telling them what you don’t want them to do, you are inadvertently kicking them into their Front Brains and getting them thinking about what you really just said and meant. For example, when you tell a team, “Don’t foul”, there is no corresponding image to this other than fouling. Your athletes are

momentarily confused about what you really want and as a result, begin to think too much about it. Instead you should be telling them, “Play clean” or “Play good defense.”

**COACH THE PROCESS, NOT THE OUTCOME** – When athletes get too caught up in the outcome of an athletic event they are much more likely to over-think. When you emphasize the importance of winning this game or qualifying for finals, etc. then you will mostly be successful in getting your athletes into the wrong part of their brain and, as a result, tightening them up both physically and mentally, and shutting them down performance-wise. Instead you want to keep them focused on the process, on doing their job in the moment, on executing the little things that lead to success with passion and to the best of their ability. When you keep your athletes in the NOW in this way, focused on what they can control, they’ll be less inclined to think and more likely to get themselves on automatic and performing well. You can talk about the importance of a competition in practice during the weeks leading up to it. However, as you get close to this big game, you want your players’ focus on doing their jobs, on doing the little things to the best of their ability in the NOW.

**KEEP YOUR ATHLETES LOOSE AND RELAXED BEFORE AND DURING PERFORMANCES** – The more relaxed your athletes are going into a performance, the more likely they’ll be to execute exactly the way that you’ve been training them. Pre-game relaxation and during game looseness are two critical prerequisites for peak performance. When athletes are too nervous and physically tight going into a game, it is impossible for them to play to their potential. Excessive tension and stress kicks athletes into their Front Brain and stimulates their over-thinking. Staying calm and loose pre-competition is much more likely to trigger a performance from their Hind Brain. What this means for you is simple: You need to make keeping your athletes loose and relaxed pre-game a **CRITICAL PRIORITY**. The bigger the game and the more important a win is, then the more you need to do everything in your power both before and during the contest to keep your athletes feeling and playing loosey-goosey. Model composure and relaxation yourself. Keep the challenge of the competition fun. Get rid of the seriousness and urgency. That kind of stuff usually backfires on coaches anyway when they take it out and use it with their athletes.

