

Pre-Performance Pep Talk

It's right before a game, match or competition, and you are starting to feel a little nervous. Feeling nervous is okay, completely normal, and to be expected before an event that holds importance to you. It is in this time before an important event that your brain may shift to "protection" mode and focus on negative aspects of performance or things to be fearful of such as:

- Losing out to an opponent
- Making a mistake
- "Choking" under pressure
- Not being able to perform to your expectations

These particular thoughts, worries and fears aren't the best things to be focusing on right before a performance because they don't help us feel confident or ready to perform. Be aware of when your mind focuses on potential negative aspects of performance and begin to switch your focus and thoughts to include more constructive and beneficial thinking to help you compete at your best level. Consider the following:

1. Rather than thinking about reasons you may fail, think about all the reasons you will succeed. Perhaps it's the many hours of practice you have put in, the time spent analyzing game tapes or studying your opponents, or your high level of preparation.
2. Instead of hypothesizing about what could go wrong, think of a time when you were in a similar situation and you performed well. You could think of a sport situation that is similar to the one you are heading into, such as when you performed well at a championship game or a qualifying match. You can even think outside the sport arena and pull strength from tough situations you have persevered through such as climbing to the summit of a mountain, overcoming an injury, or giving a speech in front of a large crowd. Recalling these situations can give you the confidence that you've got what it takes to succeed in challenging situations.
3. Replace worries about what skills you haven't mastered yet, or your weaknesses, with affirmations of the strengths you do have and consider how you can utilize these strengths. As an athlete, there are many things you already do very well, and there is a time and place to focus on your areas of improvement and things you can learn to do better. This time, however, is not just before a performance. Prior to a performance, you are better off thinking about and focusing on the things you currently do well and how to make the most of your strengths.