

When That Day Comes

Some athletes perform well at non-pressure events, but struggle at the big competitions.

Often, these athletes who do not perform to their abilities at big meets begin setting themselves up for disappointment months before the competition. It starts simply and innocently enough, as something that they tell themselves to ease their nerves for the competition in front of them. They may say, “Well, at least this meet isn’t the State Championship.” They can relax because they’re telling themselves that there’s no pressure right now, or little pressure in comparison to the big competition of the State Championship.

While this may be helpful to the athlete in the moment, it’s not helpful for the future, when they do arrive at the big meet. There’s an underlying message that says they’re happy that big competition isn’t today. If the State Championship was today, they wouldn’t be ready, they wouldn’t be able to handle the pressure, or there is something to fear. The State Championship has now become something to be afraid of and dread.

If you notice this pattern of thinking, it can be difficult to stop this thought from surfacing, but you do have the ability to couple the thought with a statement that is positive and helpful to your future performance.

Try This: Think about an event that is coming up that you are nervous about. Every time you think about the event in a negative way (e.g. happy that it hasn’t arrived yet, worry about how you will perform), follow your thought with a statement such as:

- “I am preparing every day. When [the event] arrives, I will be ready to perform.”
- “This is an exciting event. When [the event] arrives, I am going to be excited to perform to my best ability and rise to the challenge.”

Choose a statement that feels right for you. Empower yourself and think about how you want to feel when that day comes. See yourself performing with confidence and to the best of your abilities. And remember to say this statement to yourself **every time** you have a negative anticipation thought about the event.