



Competition-Coaching Introduction Advanced (T2T)

Step 4:

Basic mental skills



**Reference Material
for On Snow Workshop**



PARTNERS IN COACH EDUCATION

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Introduction

This section covers five mental-skills topics:

- 4.1 Spotting focus and anxiety problems.
- 4.2 Improving attentional control.
- 4.3 Improving emotional control.
- 4.4 Setting goals.
- 4.5 Planning for mental preparation.

The field of mental preparation and sport psychology is vast. Many excellent resources are available for further reading, and you are encouraged to consult them.

What Is Mental Preparation and Why Is It Important?

As a coach, athlete, or parent, you may have asked yourself one of the following questions at one time or another or heard others discuss them:

- Why do some athletes perform better than others who seem to have greater technical and physical abilities?
- Why do some athletes perform perfectly in practice but fail to meet their expectations in competition?
- Why are some athletes able to put forward a best-ever performance at a critical time while others seem to choke or perform well below their capabilities when it really counts?

By and large, the answers to these questions lie in the area of mental preparation. Mental preparation is about training the mind to work with the body in sport situations and training it not to work against the body.

Components of Performance

Sport performance has four major components:

- Physical component.
- Mental/emotional component.
- Tactical component.
- Technical component.

Failure to train all four components may result in less than optimal performance. While it is common to do too little mental-skills training, successful coaches and athletes often report that purposeful mental training was instrumental to their success.

Ideal Performance State (IPS)

Every athlete has an IPS, a state in which he or she is completely prepared and poised for perfect performance. The IPS is a reflection of the athlete's preparation in all four areas listed above. Developing the mental-training skills of the athletes you coach is therefore critical to helping them achieve their IPS at key competitions.

Mental Strategies Used By Successful Athletes (Weinberg and Gould, 1999)

To enhance confidence, successful athletes practice specific strategies to deal with adversity during competition:

- They practice routines to deal with unusual circumstances and distractions before and during competition.
- They concentrate wholly on the upcoming performance, blocking out irrelevant events and thoughts.
- They use several mental rehearsal methods before competition.
- They don't worry about other competitors before a competition, focusing instead on what they can control.
- They develop detailed competition plans.
- They learn to regulate arousal and anxiety.

The Role of the Coach in Mental Preparation

Your responsibilities in the area of mental preparation include:

- Building a psychologically healthy environment with athletes.
- Making basic mental skills part of regular training or finding someone who can assist in this area.
- Helping athletes integrate mental-skills training into their performance preparation.
- Helping athletes prepare for all possible events and situations.
- Helping athletes utilize goal setting to map out a journey to success.

Although you can set up the framework, conditions, and process by which the athletes you coach can develop their mental abilities, athletes will be successful in the long term only if you help them develop independence and self-direction in all areas of mental preparation.

4.1 Spotting Focus and Anxiety Problems

Signs of Focus Problems	Signs of Anxiety Problems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Is easily distracted by noise and other competitors<input type="checkbox"/> Eyes wander<input type="checkbox"/> Concentrates on the wrong thing<input type="checkbox"/> Misses cues from the environment (e.g. gets hit by a flying ball he or she should have seen coming)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Fidgets<input type="checkbox"/> Bites nails<input type="checkbox"/> Is jumpy<input type="checkbox"/> Is hypersensitive to noise and sights<input type="checkbox"/> Talks more than normal<input type="checkbox"/> Talks less than normal<input type="checkbox"/> Yawns a lot<input type="checkbox"/> Feels nauseous (butterflies)<input type="checkbox"/> Is short of breath<input type="checkbox"/> Withdraws from others<input type="checkbox"/> Sticks to others<input type="checkbox"/> Has cold, clammy hands<input type="checkbox"/> Needs to urinate a lot<input type="checkbox"/> Sweats a lot<input type="checkbox"/> Talks negatively about himself/herself<input type="checkbox"/> Has tight muscles<input type="checkbox"/> Has a headache<input type="checkbox"/> Feels as if he or she is going to vomit<input type="checkbox"/> Has a dry (cotton) mouth<input type="checkbox"/> Has difficulty sleeping

Some of the signs listed above can apply to both focus problems and anxiety problems.

While some signs occur in many athletes, each athlete will tend to show focus and anxiety problems in his or her own way. One of your key responsibilities as a coach is to learn the tell-tale signs of each athlete you coach so that you can spot when intervention might be needed.

4.2 Improving Attentional Control

4.2.1 What is Attentional Control, and Why is it important to Performance?

Attentional control is the ability to actively direct one's attention to relevant cues in the environment, to maintain that attention for the necessary period of time, and to be fully aware of the situation. The words *attention* and *concentration* can be used interchangeably, though researchers tend to prefer the word *attention* and practitioners tend to prefer the word *concentration* (Weinberg and Gould, 1999).

All athletes and coaches know that the ability to concentrate on a task for its duration is very hard to do and that it requires regular practice to be able to do so. Athletes therefore need to be fully aware of all the things that get in the way of a successful performance, and they need to control their response to such distractions.

Athletes develop *attentional* control by learning to select and concentrate on task-relevant cues and factors and to dismiss any irrelevant stimuli. Concentration in sport may be thought of as a relaxed state of being alert, allowing rapid changes in focus as the flow of the game or competitive situation changes. Concentration represents a natural, relaxed state of mind that allows athletes to receive and interpret relevant information. Successful athletes don't have to strain to pay attention, and they can narrow their focus to the relevant factors or stimuli at any given time during a game or performance.

- ❑ **Concentration** is the ability to pay attention to relevant stimuli or internal or external performance cues.
- ❑ **Focus** is the ability to concentrate on the present while performing as opposed to the future or the past.
- ❑ **Refocus** is the ability to focus on a task again following a break in concentration.
- ❑ **Attentional control** is the ability to concentrate, focus, and refocus.
- ❑ **Information processing** during performance needs to be automatic or consciously controlled.
 - ✓ **Automatic information processing** refers to the ability to process cues easily, rapidly, consistently, and economically. This comes with practice and experience. Athletes do not need to pay deliberate attention to perform exceptionally well.
 - ✓ **Controlled information processing** refers to the ability to consciously process information. Athletes do this by paying deliberate attention to the critical phases of skills or tasks. This type of information processing is common among beginners or novices, as well as when skills are more complex and the athlete is not yet totally familiar with the required movements.

Attentional Dimensions

According to Nideffer (1976; 1981), attention exists along two dimensions:

Width – broad or narrow

- ✓ *Broad attentional focus* is directed toward perceiving and interpreting many cues at the same time.
- ✓ *Narrow attentional focus* is directed toward perceiving and interpreting only one or two cues at the same time.

Direction – internal or external

- ✓ *Internal attentional focus* is directed inward, toward perceiving and interpreting cues that the performer feels or thinks.
- ✓ *External attentional focus* is directed outward, toward perceiving and interpreting cues in the surrounding environment that the performer can usually see or hear.

Athletes often have to shuttle between an *internal* and *external* focus and between a *broad* and *narrow* focus. For example, within a single play, a football quarterback may have to shift his or her attention many times to complete a pass:

- Narrow, external: receiving the snap from the centre.
- Narrow, external: stepping back into the pocket.
- Broad, external: reading the defense, looking for open receivers.
- Narrow, external: zeroing in on the intended receiver.
- Narrow, internal: processing how far/fast to throw.
- Narrow, external: throwing the ball.
- Broad, external: looking for any defense that may be about to tackle him or her.

Recent research shows that, during the execution of a skill, an *external focus of attention* will likely result in better performance than an internal focus (Lee et al., 2001). There is more information on this topic in section 5 of your CCI-L2T (On-Snow) Reference Material.

Attentional control can be developed using simple drills such as shuttling exercises, focused visualization, and self-talk strategies.

The Relationship Between Mental-Skill Strategies

Mental skills are interdependent. Consider the following:

- Being able to focus and concentrate on a task requires being in control of one's emotional state.
- Visualizing requires being focused.
- Visualizing requires being in control of one's emotions.
- Maintaining an ideal emotional state requires thinking positively about one's performance.

Integrating skills of emotional and attentional control is therefore a critical component of an effective mental training program.

4.2.2 Self Awareness and Mental Preparation

Mental skills are applicable in both sport and everyday life. To perform reliably in sport and life, however, athletes need to be able to identify their ideal performance state (IPS), understand their strengths and weaknesses in terms of their IPS, and develop strategies to build on their strengths and improve their weaknesses. This is true for all aspects of performance, but it is perhaps the hardest to do in the area of mental preparation because it demands that athletes:

- Understand their inner states (thoughts, feelings, emotions) and typical reactions.
- Understand their beliefs and values.
- Recognize their uniqueness as a performer.

In other words, mental-training strategies are different for each athlete because each athlete is a unique person who thinks and reacts in his or her own way. Moreover, developing mental skills is a life-long process that requires individual self-awareness, self-responsibility, and self-direction.

As a result, when working with individual athletes, most sport psychologists tend to begin by working with an athlete on his or her self-awareness. In other words, to chart out how to get to where you want to go, you first need to know where you are now.

4.2.3 Focus Shifts

Few Shifts		Lots of Shifts
Individual sports practiced/played in a closed environment*	Individual sports practiced/played in an open environment**	Team sports played in either an open or a closed environment in which more than two athletes are key performers at any given time
Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Archery <input type="checkbox"/> Bowling <input type="checkbox"/> Diving <input type="checkbox"/> Gymnastics <input type="checkbox"/> Trampoline <input type="checkbox"/> Weightlifting 	Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Alpine skiing <input type="checkbox"/> Athletics <input type="checkbox"/> Badminton <input type="checkbox"/> Biathlon <input type="checkbox"/> Bobsleigh <input type="checkbox"/> Boxing <input type="checkbox"/> Canoeing/Kayaking <input type="checkbox"/> Cycling, Sprinting <input type="checkbox"/> Cross-country skiing 	Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Basketball <input type="checkbox"/> Broomball <input type="checkbox"/> Field hockey <input type="checkbox"/> Football <input type="checkbox"/> Ice hockey <input type="checkbox"/> Lacrosse <input type="checkbox"/> Team handball <input type="checkbox"/> Road cycling <input type="checkbox"/> Ringette

<p>Team sports in which primarily one athlete is performing at any given time</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Lawn bowling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Equestrian <input type="checkbox"/> Fencing <input type="checkbox"/> Figure skating <input type="checkbox"/> Freestyle skiing <input type="checkbox"/> 4-wall handball <input type="checkbox"/> Judo <input type="checkbox"/> Luge <input type="checkbox"/> Nordic sports <input type="checkbox"/> Orienteering <input type="checkbox"/> Parachuting <input type="checkbox"/> Racquetball <input type="checkbox"/> Rowing <input type="checkbox"/> Sailing <input type="checkbox"/> Snowboarding <input type="checkbox"/> Speed skating (except short track) <input type="checkbox"/> Squash <input type="checkbox"/> Swimming <input type="checkbox"/> Synchronized swimming <input type="checkbox"/> Table tennis <input type="checkbox"/> Taekwondo <input type="checkbox"/> Tennis <input type="checkbox"/> Waterskiing <input type="checkbox"/> Wrestling <input type="checkbox"/> Yachting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Rugby <input type="checkbox"/> Soccer <input type="checkbox"/> Speed skating (short track) <input type="checkbox"/> Volleyball <input type="checkbox"/> Water polo <input type="checkbox"/> Wheelchair basketball
	<p>Team sports in which two or three athletes are usually the key performers at any given time</p>	
	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Baseball <input type="checkbox"/> Cricket <input type="checkbox"/> Curling <input type="checkbox"/> Softball 	

*A closed environment is one in which few changes occur (usually indoors or in a highly controlled environment).

**An open environment is one in which many changes may occur within a short period of time; usually outdoor sports or sports where there is an opponent.

4.2.4 Objects of Focus

Objects of focus refers to what the athlete is focused on at a given time. Objects of focus can be internal or external, broad or narrow (Nideffer, 1976, 1981).

	Narrow	Broad
Internal Perceived internally by the athlete; usually sensations of the body/body parts or thoughts	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Orientation of body in space <input type="checkbox"/> Arm/leg position <input type="checkbox"/> Posture <input type="checkbox"/> Thoughts, feelings, self-talk <input type="checkbox"/> Visualizing individual performance 	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Visualizing teammates' movements <input type="checkbox"/> Visualizing opponent's patterns of play
Externals Can be seen, heard, or touched by the athlete	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Target <input type="checkbox"/> Piece of equipment <input type="checkbox"/> Start signal <input type="checkbox"/> Turning wall <input type="checkbox"/> Opponent <input type="checkbox"/> Playing surface/terrain/water <input type="checkbox"/> Trajectory of ball <input type="checkbox"/> Time clock <input type="checkbox"/> Landing spot 	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Movement of teammates <input type="checkbox"/> Fans in the stands <input type="checkbox"/> Reading opponents' patterns of play

Recent research suggests that while they are executing a movement, athletes should focus on:

- (1) something external to their body (e.g. a target); or
- (2) the expected effect of their movements (e.g. trajectory of ball).

They should NOT focus too much on how they are performing the movement or on what they feel. In motor learning, this type of instruction is called *external focus of attention* (Lee et al., 2001).

This information may cause you to rethink how to focus when learning a new skill or performing a learned skill in competition. It may also cause you to rethink some of the strategies you currently use with the athletes you coach. *Errors often happen not because athletes are not*

focusing, but because they are focusing on the wrong things at the wrong time.

Note: The *Teaching and Learning* module (CCI-L2T (On-Snow) Reference Material) presents more detailed information regarding what athletes should focus on during their performance.

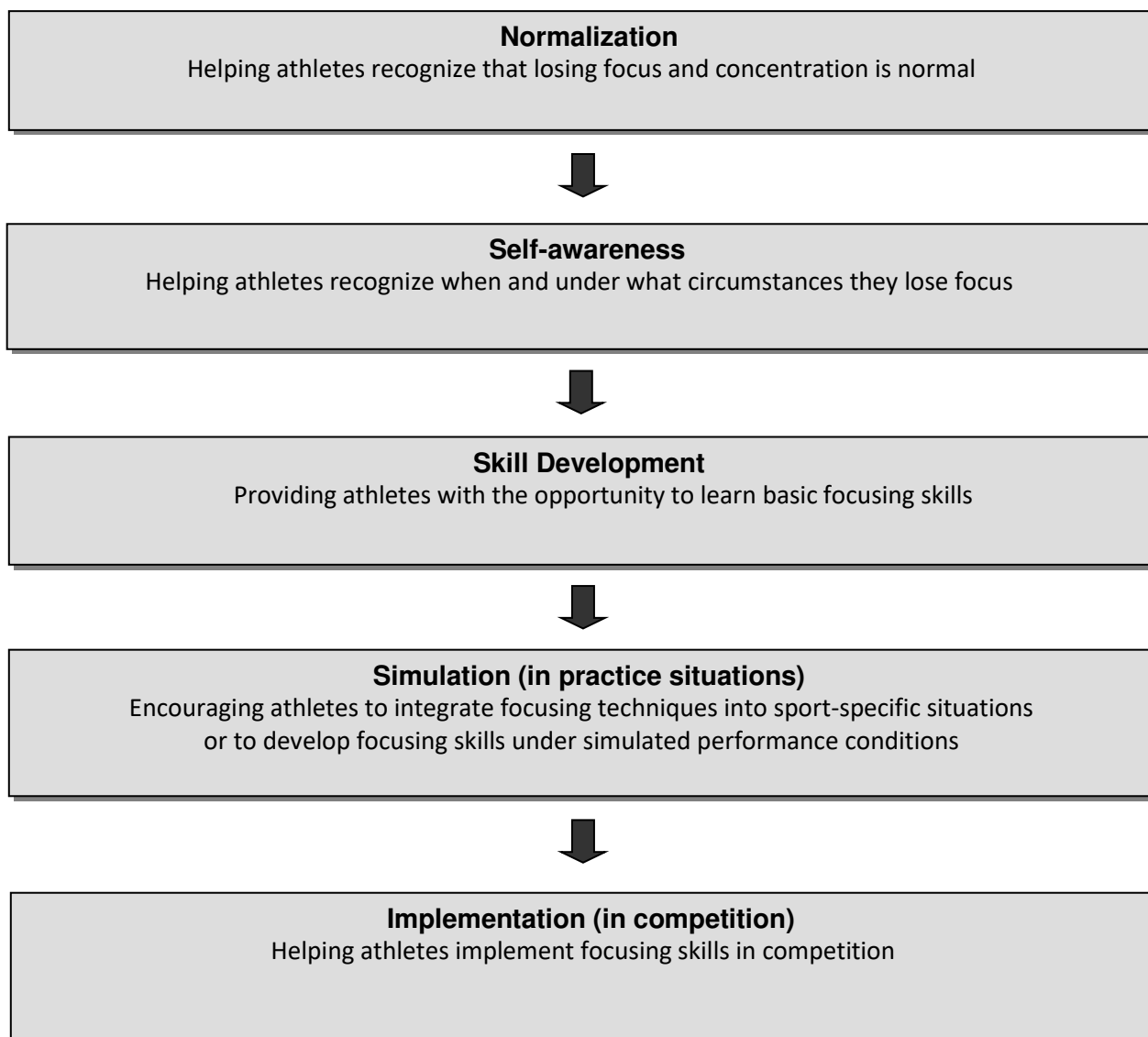
4.2.5 Examples of Distracters

Sources and Examples of Potential Distracters
<ul style="list-style-type: none">❑ Spectators (e.g. heckling, yelling, cheering, waving objects).❑ Coach (e.g. calling out instructions, yelling).❑ Other teammates (e.g. chatting, calling out instructions, asking for help).❑ Competitors (e.g. chatting, trash talking, making physical contact, posturing).❑ Officials (e.g. poor calls or bias).❑ Ambient noise (e.g. plane flying overhead, commentary over loudspeakers).❑ Environmental conditions (e.g. flickering light, gusty wind, uneven field, poor visibility).❑ Equipment (e.g. rock in shoe, strap too tight, forgotten piece of equipment, broken or torn piece of equipment).❑ Organization (e.g. poor tournament schedule, late start times).

Anything that has the potential to draw the athlete's attention can distract the athlete.

It is impossible to control for all potential distracters. This is why it is so important to help athletes learn to block out distracters and to refocus if and when they lose their focus.

4.2.6 Process for Improving Focus



Successful athletes can minimize the effect of momentary losses in concentration. Improving athletes' focus involves the steps above.

This process generally takes place over a season.

4.2.7 Basic Skills for Improving Focus

Athletes need to learn the following basic skills so they can focus effectively during practice and competition:

- Concentration** – learning to concentrate for a period of time on a particular object or cue
- Shuttling** – learning to shuttle between internal and external focus
- Managing distracters** – recognizing distracters to focus and learning to tune them out

Athletes can also use visualization, positive self-talk, and thought-stopping to improve focus.

Sample activities that can be used to improve focus are presented below and in the following pages. Coaches and athletes often find it relatively easy to adapt these activities and to create their own activities for improving focus.

Note: To keep descriptions short, some of the activities presented in the following pages are outlined as though you were leading a group of athletes through them, while others are described as though you were an observer.

4.2.7 (a) Concentration

Concentrating on a Clock Face

- ❑ Focus on the second hand of a watch or clock as it makes one complete revolution. Blink your eyes or snap your fingers every five seconds.
- ❑ After one complete revolution of the second hand, concentrate on the sweep hand as it makes another complete revolution. This time, blink your eyes or snap your fingers every ten seconds.
- ❑ After this second complete revolution of the sweep hand, concentrate on the second hand as it makes a third complete revolution. This time, alternate blinking your eyes and snapping your fingers at five-second intervals.

Practicing this exercise a few times a day gradually improves the ability to concentrate.

Concentrating on an Object

- ❑ **Choose a concentration word.** For example, if you are in a ball-oriented sport, choose the word ball. If you are not in a ball-oriented sport, choose a short, soft, non-distracting word that will help you focus on an object or picture as you concentrate on it, for example, one, run, goal, lane, or arm. Look at the object, and say your concentration word — repeating a word helps keep the mind from wandering.
- ❑ **Look at the object of concentration.** Now begin to examine every detail of the object you are concentrating on. For example, look at a ball's outline, at its surface. Is it rough or smooth? Does it have seams, dimples, printing on it? Are there scratches or scuff marks? Look at its colors and the way the light and shadows fall on its surface. Don't try to stop yourself from blinking. Relax.
- ❑ **Feel the object.** For instance, pick up a ball; feel its texture; turn it around, and look at it from various angles.
- ❑ **Imagine the object.** With a ball, for example, put it down, and focus your mind and eyes on it. See the ball as fully as you can so that its smallest detail will stand out in your mind. Know the ball. "Marry it." Don't try to overpower the object of your concentration. As you relax and keep your eye on the object, you'll find it will seem to come to you. You must maintain something of a passive attitude in this process, allowing the object of your concentration to enter your mind fully and not simply be something external that you are studying. When you concentrate, you will find that this seemingly mysterious process happens quite naturally.
- ❑ **Get the feeling.** When your concentration breaks — as it must — say to yourself, "I have been concentrating on [the name of the object]. This is what it feels like to be concentrating.

I am relaxed, I feel good, and my attention is totally focused on [the name of the object]. This is concentration.” Look back at the object.

- ❑ **Say the concentration word again.** Now say the concentration word to yourself. Look at the object. Concentrate.
- ❑ **Relax.** Use the relaxation technique you are most comfortable with.

Debrief: Learning to concentrate is a prerequisite of learning to focus on internal and external cues.

Note: This material is based on Tutko (1976); the exercise should take about 10 minutes.

Learning to Focus on Cues in the Environment

❑ **Baseball Exercise**

Phase 1: The performer has a tennis ball and stands in front of a group; he or she is instructed to throw the ball to the person with one hand in the air. This person has been designated by the coach or the members of the group, but the performer does not know who he or she is. On the coach’s command, all group members but one throw both hands in the air. The performer must throw the ball to the individual with only one hand in the air.

Phase 2: Repeat the exercise – this time one person puts both hands in the air but with thumbs tucked in. All other group members also have both arms in the air, their hands are open and facing the performer, and they sway their arms slowly backward, forward, and side to side. The person instructed to keep thumbs tucked into the hands also sways his or her arms slowly. The performer is instructed to throw the ball to the odd person out, but no cue is given about the nature of the difference.

Debrief: Discuss the conditions under which the person throwing the ball had to perform. Highlight the impact of visual distracters and the need to look for important cues in the environment to make performance decisions.

4.2.7 (b) Shuttling (Internal – External Concentration)

- ❑ Athletes are instructed to choose a partner.
- ❑ The person who goes first must close his or her eyes; tune in to some sensation, feeling, or thought; and say something like “Now I am aware of a pain in my leg,” “Now I am aware of my breathing,” or “Now I am feeling silly.”
- ❑ The person then opens his or her eyes and says “Now I am aware of...,” adding something that is happening outside himself or herself. For instance, he or she says “Now I am aware of the sunlight” or “Now I am aware of your eyes.”
- ❑ Repeat the process — first an inside statement, then an outside one — for a few minutes without a break. If the person gets stuck, the partner should help out by asking “Now I am aware of...?”
- ❑ The partner does the concentration exercise.
- ❑ Later, the exercise is repeated with the eyes open all the time.

Debrief: The ability to shuttle between internal and external focus is necessary in games such as football, where a quarterback must focus on a set of broad external cues (e.g. the game unfolding in front of him or her), shift to a narrow external cue (e.g. the receiver's running pattern), and shift to an internal focus (e.g. in deciding how and when to throw the ball.)

Note: This exercise on shuttling is based on Syer & Connolly (1998).

4.2.7 (c) Managing Distracters and Focusing on Relevant Cues

Visualization Exercise for Improving Focus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Sit back, get into a comfortable position, and close your eyes.<input type="checkbox"/> Think of a particular skill in your sport.<input type="checkbox"/> Imagine yourself performing that skill.<input type="checkbox"/> Focus externally on developing a clear and detailed image of yourself performing the skill.<input type="checkbox"/> Focus on the sounds you might hear as you perform the skill.<input type="checkbox"/> Focus internally on the sensations or feelings as you perform the skill.<input type="checkbox"/> Finally, once you have a clear image of yourself performing and feeling the skill, choose an external cue to focus on that is associated with the outcome of the skill.<input type="checkbox"/> For example, choose the back of the rim of a basketball net, the bottom right or left corner of the soccer net, the bull's-eye on a target, or a catcher's mitt.<input type="checkbox"/> As you perform the skill in your mind's eye, shift your focus to this external cue as you perform the skill.

Focus on the Clock Face

- Focus on the clock face, and click your fingers every five seconds.
- Now click your fingers at five, 10, 15, five, 10, 15 seconds.
- Now try to maintain your focus and the finger-clicking sequence while faced with a distracting sound such as:
 - ✓ Hand clapping by others around you
 - ✓ Hand clapping and foot stamping by others around you (increased distractions).

Debrief

- Athletes rarely have the luxury of entirely controlling all elements of their environment. There are always distracters of one type or another.
- Some distractions occur naturally, while others are deliberate, e.g. on the part of opposition or spectators.
- Recognizing and managing distracters is a key to performing successfully.

Positive Self-Talk and Thought-Stopping: Key Points

- ❑ Negative thoughts (e.g. “I may lose this game because...”) are distracters that decrease the ability to concentrate and to focus on important environmental cues.
- ❑ To become aware of negative thoughts, the athlete must first recognize their existence. The thoughts may occur very rapidly and be automatic. Personal awareness of these thoughts and of their nature is essential to stopping and replacing them.
- ❑ You may ask the athletes to ‘listen’ to their internal thoughts the next time they have performance-related anxiety and to record them.
 - ✓ What are the thoughts?
 - ✓ What conditions do they typically occur in?
 - ✓ How do these thoughts make you feel?

Recognizing, Stopping, and Replacing Thoughts

- ❑ Sit quietly, close your eyes, relax, and recall any situation that evokes negative thoughts that have affected your sport performance.
- ❑ Sense the feelings and actions that accompany these thoughts.
- ❑ Think “Stop”, and immediately replace negative thoughts with more appropriate ones. Sense the feelings and actions accompanying these new thoughts.
- ❑ Think about how the feelings and actions associated with the old thoughts differed from those associated with the new thoughts. Think about how this experience relates to the competitive situation.

Record your responses in the following chart.

<p>What negative thoughts run through your mind before a performance in which you are anxious that you might not do well?</p>	<p>What words might you use to stop these thoughts?</p>	<p>Write down positive thoughts to replace the negative thoughts.</p>
<p>List them below</p>	<p>List them below</p>	<p>List them below</p>
<p>What negative thoughts run through your mind when you are experiencing difficulties during a sport performance?</p>	<p>What words might you use to stop these thoughts?</p>	<p>Write down positive thoughts to replace the negative thoughts.</p>
<p>List them below</p>	<p>List them below</p>	<p>List them below</p>

4.3 Improving Emotional Control

4.3.1 What are Emotions, and Why are They Important for Performance?

Emotions or feelings are an important component of total human functioning and they are extremely significant for team and individual sport performance (Hanin, 2000). They can provide the athlete with the energy that triggers the joy and ecstasy of performance, or they can shift drastically toward despair and hopelessness when things go wrong or expectations are not met. Emotions can be easily observed; as a result, they can be used to the performer's advantage or disadvantage, the opponent's advantage or disadvantage.

Intensifying emotions requires a stimulus (or trigger); once the trigger is removed, the performer can usually return to a more normal emotional state. Athletes need to understand the causes and consequences of their dominant emotions and moods, and they need to know how to control them effectively.

The ideal emotional state (IES) is the condition in which the athlete experiences appropriate feelings and maintains them at optimum levels of intensity and functioning in a way that enhances performance. Eight emotions have been identified as important in sport: anxiety, anger, shame, guilt, hope, relief, happiness, and pride (Lazarus, 2000).

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety can be a positive emotion when it reflects excitement or eagerness to perform well because the athlete feels well prepared and because he or she has coping responses in place to meet the demands of the task. But anxiety can be a negative emotion if it reflects feelings of apprehension; such feelings usually occur because the athlete does not feel well prepared.

Types of Anxiety

- ❑ **Somatic or physical anxiety** is a positive or negative set of physiological responses to performance usually experienced immediately before the start of the competition. This anxiety takes the form of feelings of excitement, increased heart, increased breathing rate, etc.
- ❑ **Cognitive or mental anxiety** is a positive or negative response that indicates excitement or worry, depending on how the athlete perceives the demands of the task. For example, the athlete may feel uncertain or apprehensive, worry, or experience self-doubt regarding the performance process or outcome.
- ❑ **Trait anxiety** is a tendency to respond to a threatening situation, person, or event with high or low levels of anxiety. It is a personal character trait to be more or less anxious (apprehensive or excited).
- ❑ **State anxiety** is the feeling of apprehension or excitement that an athlete perceives in the *here and now*, i.e. at this precise moment in time and given the present situation.

Why is Anxiety Relevant to Sport Performance?

- ❑ Anxiety can be **functional** — it can improve performance by facilitating appropriate thoughts or actions.
- ❑ Anxiety can be **dysfunctional** — it can detract from performance by causing inappropriate thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.

Anxiety states are normal, and every athlete experiences both positive anxiety and negative anxiety in competitive or evaluative settings.

Each athlete should seek to identify and understand the specific **causes** of his or her anxiety and the resulting **consequences** for performance. Athletes should also learn coping mechanisms that will help them manage their anxiety and therefore improve their performance.

Several skills can help athletes control their anxiety, including breathing control exercises, mind-to-body relaxation exercises, body-to-mind relaxation exercises, visualization strategies, positive self-talk and thought-stopping techniques. These may be developed individually and then combined into routines that athletes can develop, refine, and implement in practice.

4.3.2 What is Stress, and How Does it Relate to Anxiety?

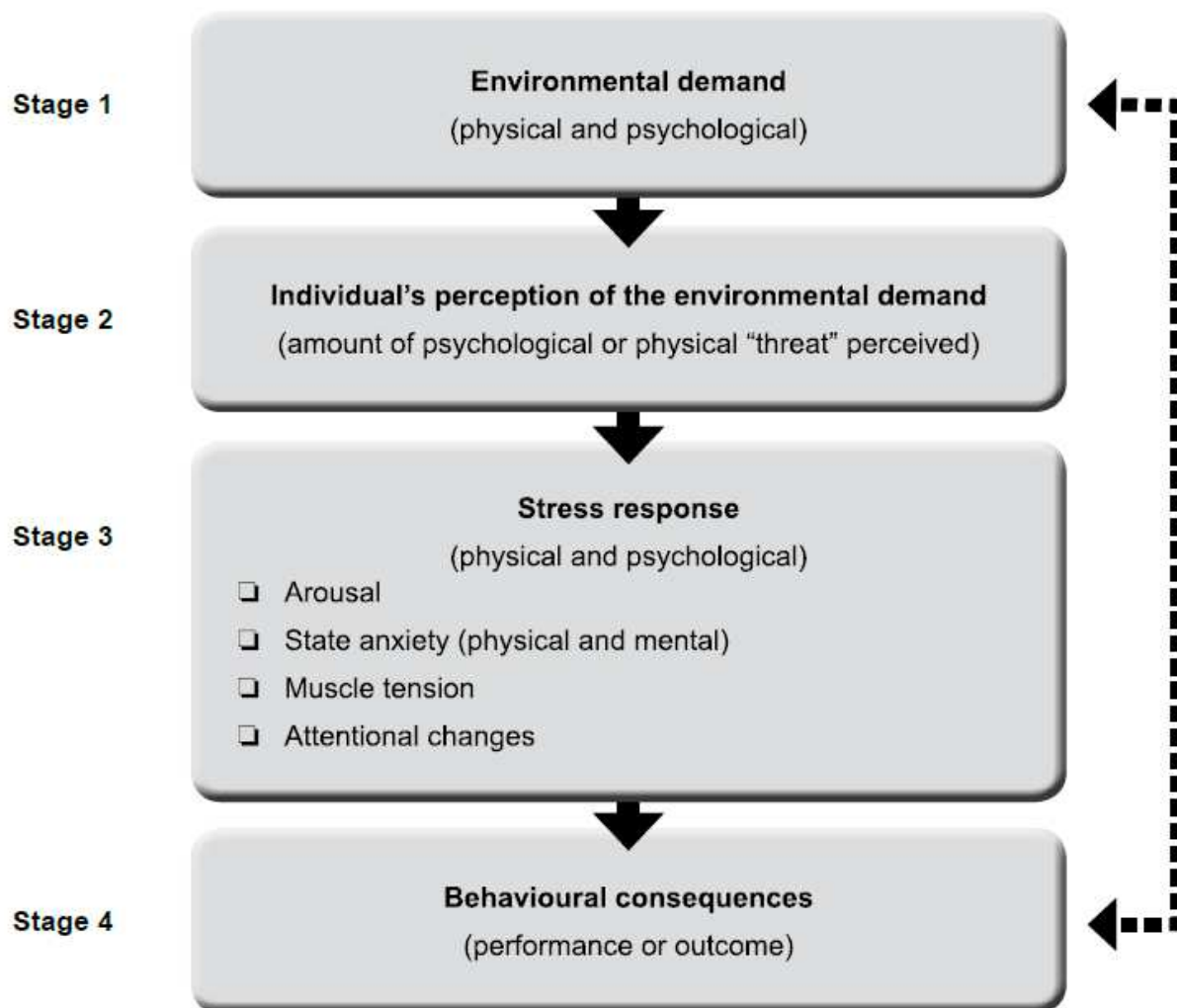
Definition of Stress

Competition is about testing an athlete's abilities against an opponent or the clock in a particular environment. By its very nature, competition may cause stress. Stress is "a substantial imbalance between demand [physical and/or psychological] and response capability, under conditions where failure to meet that demand has important consequences" (McGrath, 1970, p.20). An athlete experiencing stress is therefore (1) recognizing a challenge and (2) perceiving that he or she may not meet the challenge.

As you can see from the chart on the following page, McGrath (1970) breaks the manifestation of stress into four stages, with anxiety in Stage 3:

Myths about Stress

- ❑ **Myth #1: Stress is bad.** Stress can lead to anxiety: being excited, being uneasy, being worried. But anxiety can be positive (excitement that contributes positively to performance) or negative (worry that detracts from performance). When athletes become overly anxious and their anxiety level exceeds their coping abilities, performance in competition may suffer. However, stress may also be positive, and stimulate athletes to excel or surpass previous performances.
- ❑ **Myth #2: Some athletes don't experience stress.** As the figure on the following page shows, all athletes may experience the stress of competition, and anxiety is a common and natural response to such stress. However, some athletes don't become overly anxious when exposed to stress; instead, they experience heightened awareness and usually can hardly wait for the competition to start. This is positive anxiety.



Negative anxiety usually occurs in athletes who dwell on things that are very difficult or impossible for them to control or who don't feel prepared for the challenge they are facing. Negative anxiety is often linked to fear about what others will think of the athlete if he or she does not perform well.

Common Causes of Negative Anxiety	
<p>Somatic (physical)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Tiredness/loss of sleep <input type="checkbox"/> Poor/lengthy travel arrangements or other organizational problems <input type="checkbox"/> Changes in environmental conditions <input type="checkbox"/> Chronic adrenalin rush 	<p>Cognitive (mental)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of disappointing others (e.g. mom, dad, teammates, coach) <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of making a fool of themselves by failing at the task, especially when others are watching

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Physical tension/tightness <input type="checkbox"/> Changes in physiological states (e.g. increased heart rate, pulse rate) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of not being skilled enough or fit enough to meet the challenge <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of not making a team selection or event <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of injury <input type="checkbox"/> Perceived importance of the competition <input type="checkbox"/> Poor travel arrangements or other organizational problems <input type="checkbox"/> Changes in variables not in the athlete's control <input type="checkbox"/> Other aspects of life that cannot be successfully "parked" <input type="checkbox"/> Interruptions from others before or during competition (e.g. media, significant others) <input type="checkbox"/> Poor decisions by officials <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of social support
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4.3.3 The Relationship Between Arousal and Performance

Inverted U Theory

Arousal is “a general physiological and psychological activation of the organism that varies on a continuum from deep sleep to intense excitement” (Weinberg and Gould, 1999). For years, sport psychologists have described the relationship between arousal and performance as an inverted U, as shown below in Figure 4.1.

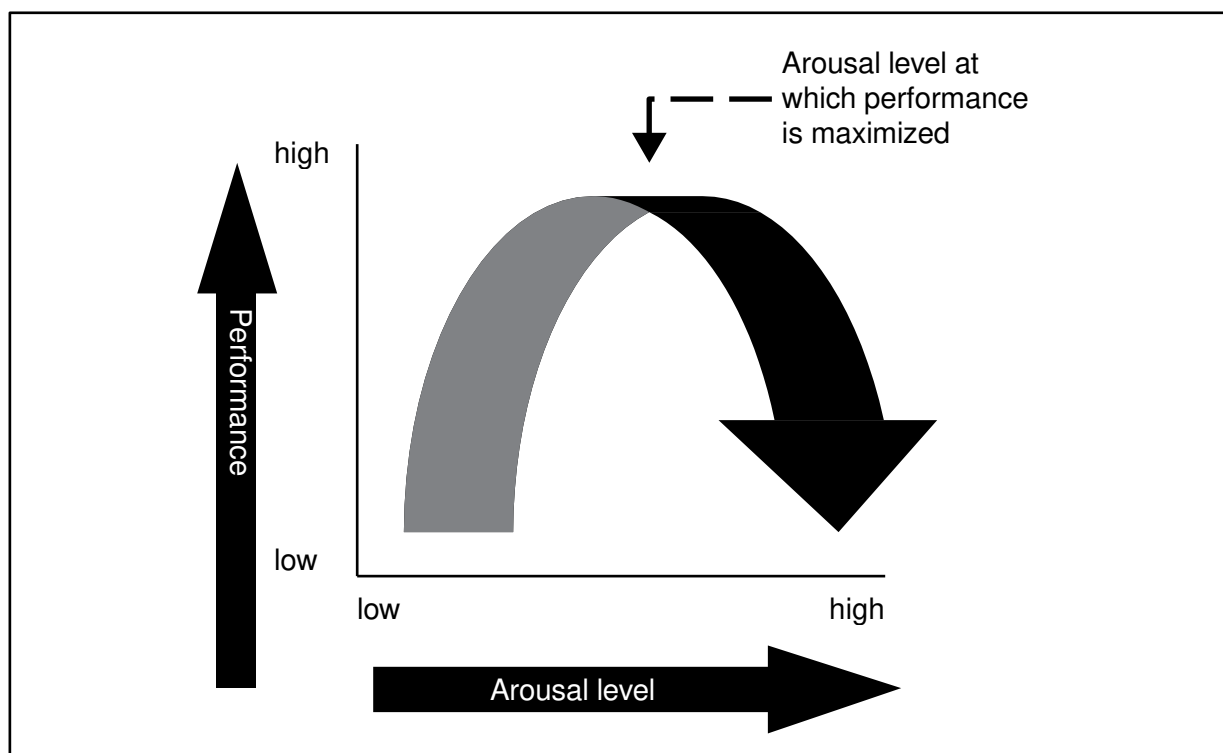
Figure 5.1 shows that there is an optimal arousal level at which performance is maximized. If an athlete is not aroused enough or if the athlete is too aroused, performance will probably not be as good as it might under conditions of optimal arousal.

The theory of optimal arousal also suggests that, on the continuum from low to high arousal, the point corresponding to the optimal arousal level may vary according to the type of task the athlete is performing or the sport situation he or she is involved in. Here are some general findings about the relationship between arousal and performance:

- A high arousal level** is usually most conducive to successful performance if (1) the physical demands of the task are high, (2) the conditions in which the athlete performs are relatively simple and predictable, (3) fine motor precision is not critical, and (4) the athlete has to make few decisions (e.g. linemen in football; throws events in athletics; weightlifting).

- ❑ **A moderate arousal level** is usually most conducive to successful performance if (1) the physical demands of the task are moderate, (2) the conditions in which the athlete performs are complex and unpredictable, (3) fine motor precision is important, and (4) the athlete may have to make decisions quickly, (e.g. most team, racquet, and combative sports).
- ❑ **A low arousal level** is usually most conducive to successful performance if (1) the physical demands of the task or situation are low, (2) the conditions in which the athlete performs are predictable, (3) fine motor precision is critical, and (4) the athlete does not have to make decisions quickly (e.g. precision sports such as archery, golf, and shooting; precision positions such as skip in curling).

Figure 4.1



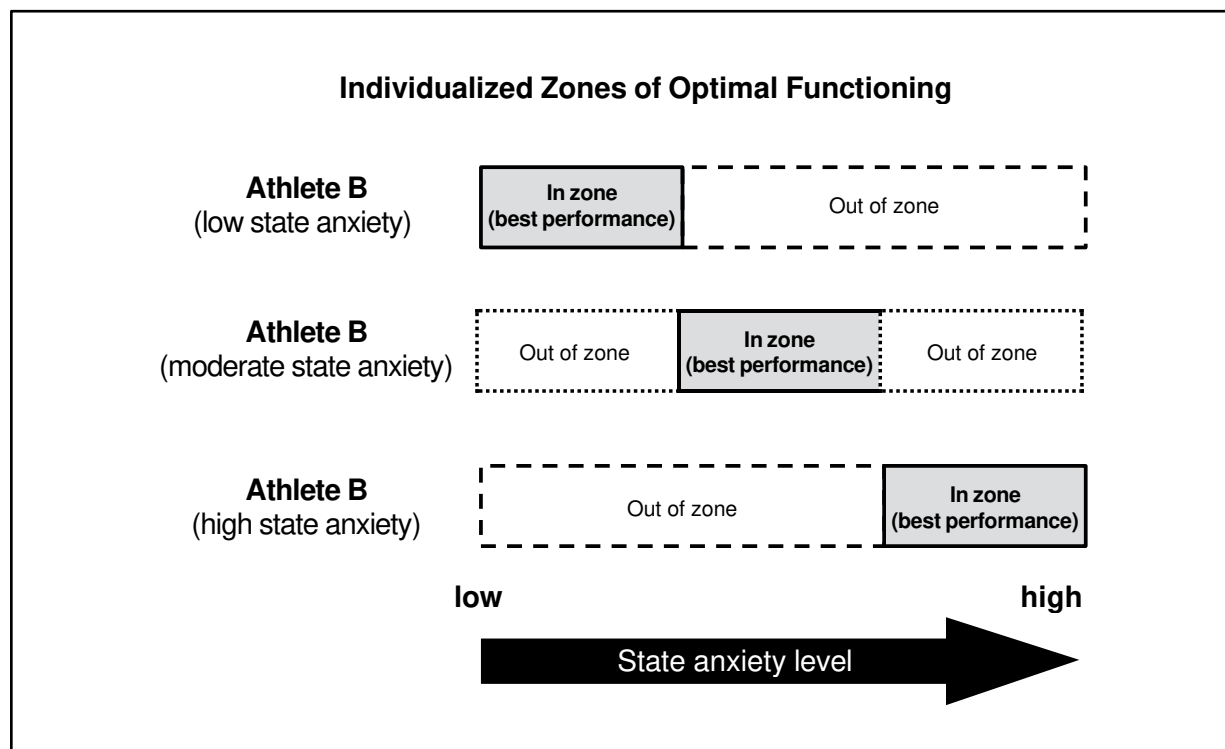
Sport psychologists have proposed several alternatives to the inverted-U theory. These researchers have the following reservations about the inverted-U theory:

- ❑ Athletes don't always experience optimal arousal in the middle of the arousal continuum.
- ❑ The findings about arousal and the type of task being performed listed above may not apply to all athletes.

One alternative to the inverted-U theory is called *Individualized Zones Of Optimal Functioning* (IZOF); this theory was proposed by Hanin (1980,1997).

This model suggests that athletes may differ with regard to the level of state anxiety at which they perform best. State anxiety refers to "moment-to-moment changes in feelings of nervousness, worry, and apprehension associated with arousal of the body" (Weinberg and Gould, 1999).

Figure 4.2



There are plenty of views in the sport psychology literature with regard to arousal and anxiety and their effects on performance. However, most sport psychologists agree on the following:

- ❑ Athletes and their coaches must learn what the ideal arousal or anxiety level is for each athlete and seek to create conditions that reproduce that level to increase the probability of achieving the best possible performance.
- ❑ How athletes interpret their arousal and anxiety levels around a competition (e.g. “it is a bad thing and I am going to fail” or “it is a good thing and I will perform better as a result”) greatly influences whether their performance will improve or deteriorate as a result of that anxiety.

Weinberg and Gould (1999) offer the following practical guidelines regarding stress, arousal, and anxiety:

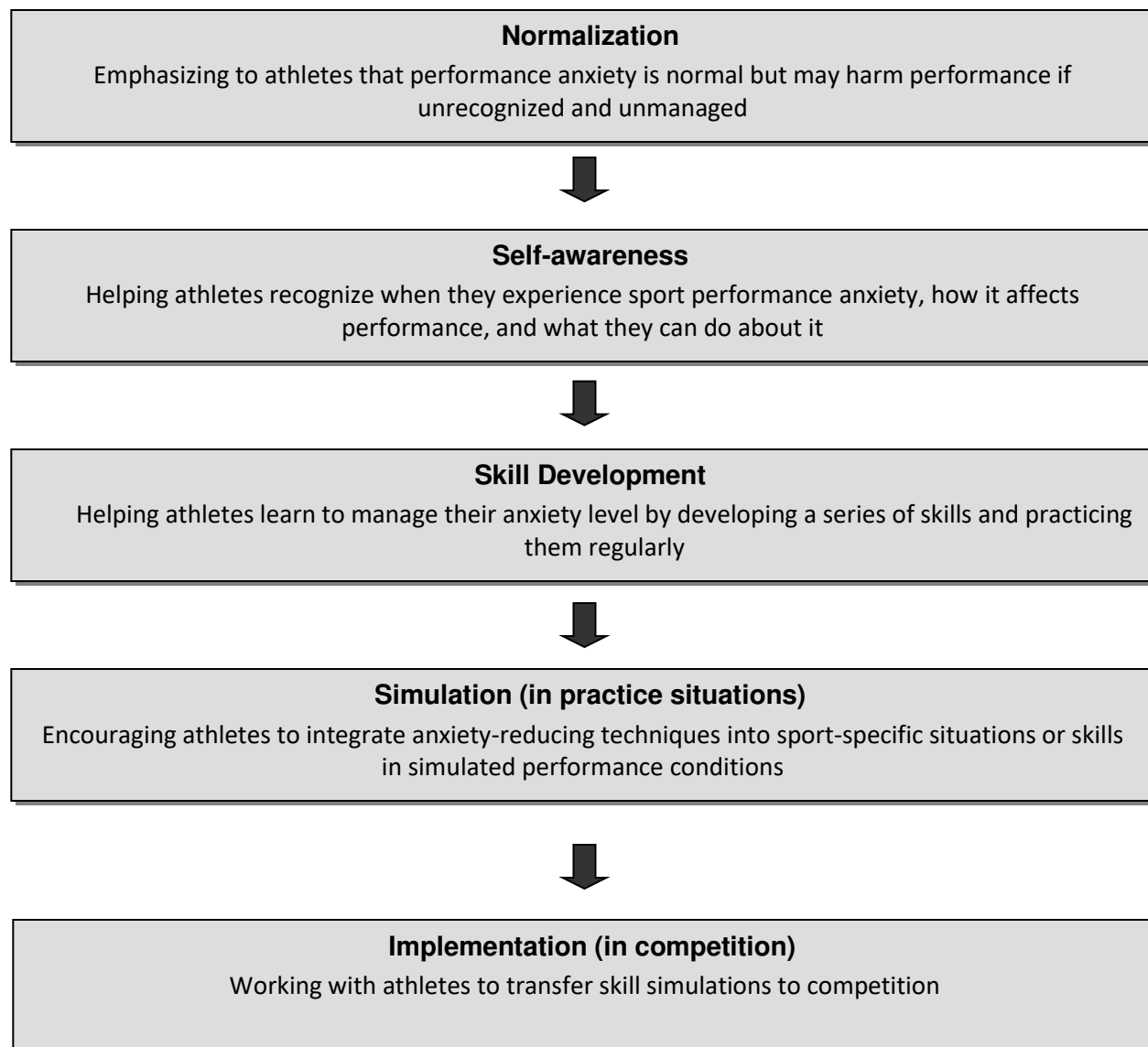
- ❑ Identify the optimal combination of arousal-related emotions needed for best performance.
- ❑ Recognize how personal and situational factors interact to influence arousal, anxiety, and performance.
- ❑ Recognize the signs of increased arousal and anxiety.
- ❑ Tailor coaching and instructional practices to individuals.
- ❑ Help athletes become more confident; it will help them cope better with stress and anxiety.

4.3.4 Process for Managing Anxiety

Helping athletes manage the anxiety associated with sport performance requires a series of steps similar to those presented earlier for improving focus. They are as follows:

This process can be implemented gradually, over the course of a season.

The exercises described in the following pages deal with the *skill development* and *simulation* steps.



4.3.5 Techniques for Managing Anxiety

Before You Begin: Pulse Rate

Record your radial (wrist) pulse rate for 15 seconds. Do this twice, and take the average value (count in-between pulses at the end of the 15-second period as one-half a beat). Then multiply by 4 to obtain your heart rate in beats per minute. This is your heart rate; it will be affected by your arousal or anxiety level, as well as by coffee consumption, recent meals, etc.

Through the following series of exercises, we will attempt to lower your heart rate significantly.

Breathing Control

In addition to heart rate, breathing rate and depth are indicators of anxiety. Managing breathing rate and depth is a prerequisite of relaxation. Relaxation is in turn a prerequisite of visualization, a mental-preparation technique that we will explore later in this document.

Controlled Breathing — Kinesthetic Controlled Breathing. The technique for this type of controlled breathing is as follows:

- Close your eyes.
- Feel your stomach move out; keep your chest and shoulders steady.
- Slowly inhale, feeling the air in your chest increase and your shoulders rise.
- Hold your breath.
- Slowly exhale, feeling a release in tension as your shoulders and chest drop and your stomach relaxes.
- Now shift to listening to your breathing.

Controlled Breathing — Audio-controlled Breathing. The technique for this kind of controlled breathing is as follows:

- Close your eyes.
- Hear yourself slowly inhale and exhale air as you breathe.
- Slowly inhale.
- Hear the air pass through your mouth and nose.
- Feel the build-up of tension in your chest.
- Slowly release the air.
- Hear the sound of air passing through your nose and mouth.

Debrief. Note that you are also focusing on certain cues (kinesthetic and auditory). In other words, focus and relaxation skills are mutually dependent.

The Relaxation Response

Key Points

- ❑ Athletes often need to relax quickly and bring their body and mind under control rapidly to perform well (e.g. a biathlete preparing to shoot after skiing).
- ❑ There are two techniques for producing a relaxation response:
 - ✓ Mind-to-body control. Mind-to-body control is often used simultaneously with the concept of a rapid relaxation response.
 - ✓ Body-to-mind control. Body-to-mind control is often referred to as progressive relaxation.
- ❑ We will use a mind-to-body technique and demonstrate one aspect of body-to-mind control.
- ❑ Relaxation is a prerequisite of effective visualization.

Mind-to-Body Control. The technique for mind-to-body control is as follows:

- ❑ Select a quiet environment.
- ❑ Get into a comfortable position, and close your eyes.
- ❑ Low lighting or a dark area may help you as you perfect this technique.
- ❑ Concentrate fully on taking two or three deep breaths (don't hyperventilate; breathe under control).
- ❑ Become aware of your breathing. While breathing out, repeat a word or phrase, like a mantra, e.g. "slow, easy, calm, relaxed." Breathe in . . . out, and repeat; continue for 10 to 20 minutes.
- ❑ Adopt a passive attitude; allow any distractions that enter the mind to pass through. Let thoughts that arise slip through your mind like the credits at the end of a movie. They are there, but you pay little attention to them as they scroll by.
- ❑ Allow relaxation to occur at its own pace.
- ❑ Over time, the relaxation response will occur more quickly.

Body-to-Mind Control

- ❑ Key Points
 - ✓ Demonstrate this technique with shoulder contractions to differentiate it from the mind- to-body technique.
 - ✓ Important – it is strongly suggested that you modify the contraction-relaxation phase of the exercise for individuals who are hypertensive or who recently suffered a cardiovascular injury such as a heart attack or a stroke. Ensure that anyone with such conditions gently flexes and relaxes their muscles. Under no circumstances should such individuals engage in progressive maximal tightening/contraction exercises.

❑ **The steps are as follows:**

- ✓ Select a quiet room with dim lighting, and make sure there will be no distractions or interruptions.
- ✓ Check to see that athletes are warmly dressed and that their clothing is dry and comfortable.
- ✓ Spread athletes around the room so that there is at least one meter between them.
- ✓ Explain the principle behind relaxing:
 - Relaxation is important.
 - Relaxation will help you rest and sleep.
 - When you contract a muscle and then relax it, the muscle returns to a more relaxed state than it was in before the contraction took place.
 - Body-to-mind relaxation requires progressively contracting and relaxing your muscles to produce whole-body relaxation.
 - The first session will take approximately 30 minutes.
- ✓ Start in the anatomical position. Lie on your back with your arms at your side. Check these features:
 - The middle of your head is touching the mat and you are looking straight up.
 - Your shoulders are pressing on the mat.
 - Your buttocks are pressing equally on the mat.
 - Your calves are pressing equally on the mat.
 - Your heels are pressing equally on the mat.”
- ✓ “You should be lying straight on the mat. Your spine should be straight, your thighs and calves are close together and touching lightly, and your arms are extended by your side with your palms facing slightly up. Check for the last time that you are straight and relaxed and that the pressure of your body parts on the mat is equal on both sides of your body. You will find this easier if you lightly close your eyes.”
- ✓ Now walk among the athletes to see that their position is correct. It is preferable that athletes not use head pillows or wear shoes.
- ✓ “We are now going to do a series of exercises. Each exercise will involve a very hard contract-hold-release sequence. The hold is for a period of 4-5 seconds. Then slowly relax the body part/muscle you contracted. When you do the exercises, contract only the muscles involved in that exercise”.
- ✓ It is good practice to do a preliminary practice exercise involving the shoulders (tension is often present in this part of the body).
- ✓ “Contract! Shrug your shoulders, and progressively tighten the muscles, nothing else; three-four-five, relax slowly to your side. Feel your shoulders relax; they may tingle a little; they may feel heavy, and they may feel warm.”
- ✓ It may be necessary to remind athletes to contract only the muscle or body part mentioned

in the instructions.

- ✓ The exercise routine progresses from the toes to the top of the head. After the first two exercises, introduce concentrating on breathing control. By the time the exercises are finished, the focus should be on breathing control and the total heaviness of the body.

Visualization Exercises

Key Points

- ❑ Feeling relaxed is a prerequisite of effective visualization.
- ❑ Begin with a familiar image to help athletes buy in.
- ❑ *Visualization and imagery* are often used interchangeably. However, there are subtle differences. Visualization generally involves seeing the actual skilled performance or routine. Imagery is more creative and often combines an image such as a graceful swan or a powerful animal or machine with powerful words that in themselves create images.

Learning to Visualize

- ❑ **Stage 1:** Find a comfortable position, take two or three deep breaths, and say Relax as you breathe out. Once you feel relaxed, go to Stage 2.
- ❑ **Stage 2:** Visualization exercise for all the senses. Now you are feeling relaxed, imagine a place you might go when you want to get away from it all; a place that was/is special to you either as a child or adult; a place with which you associate good feelings; a place in which you feel peaceful and safe.
 - ✓ Imagine the scene in your mind; add as much detail in your mind as you can.
 - ✓ Focus on the sounds you might hear in the situation you “see” in your mind.
 - ✓ Focus on the sensations you would experience in your body (e.g. touch).
 - ✓ Focus on the smells associated with the image in your mind.

After you finish, take a few moments to write down the factors you found easiest to see, feel, smell, hear, etc., and those that were hardest. These will be the important visualization cues that you can use as you build your images in practice or in skill rehearsal.

Debrief: Note that you are also training focusing skills, e.g. focusing on feelings, sounds, etc. In fact, creative imagery and visualization both double as a focusing skill.

Alternative Exercise Combining Relaxation and Visualization for All the Senses

The following exercise helps athletes visualize a scene by telling them the sensations they will experience:

- ❑ Get into a comfortable position and use the mind-to-body approach to invoke the relaxation response.
- ❑ Visualize yourself sitting on a sandy beach leading to a pebbled shore; waves gently wash ashore. Ahead you can see the horizon; on your right are cliffs and a rock outcrop;

seagulls fly above; feel the soft warm sand between your fingers.

- ❑ Now add the sound of the waves.
- ❑ Now add relaxing music.
- ❑ Pause at each step, and have athletes check that they are feeling relaxed and comfortable.

4.3.6 Energizing for Performance

Figure 4.3 illustrates how emotional and attentional control skills are interrelated.

Key Points

- ❑ Emotional and attentional control exercises are mutually dependent.
- ❑ Some techniques may be used for gaining emotional control, increasing focus, and energizing.
- ❑ Relaxation and focusing skills can be combined into one routine.

Emotional Control

- ❑ **Phase 1:** Get into a comfortable position. Take three deep breaths. Now, focus on feeling and listening to your breathing every two or three breaths.
- ❑ **Phase 2:** Use the mind-to-body approach to invoke the relaxation response:
 - ✓ Focus on controlling your breathing.
 - ✓ Focus on your relaxation words, e.g. “calm, easy, relaxed.”
 - ✓ Focus on repeating your “mantra”.

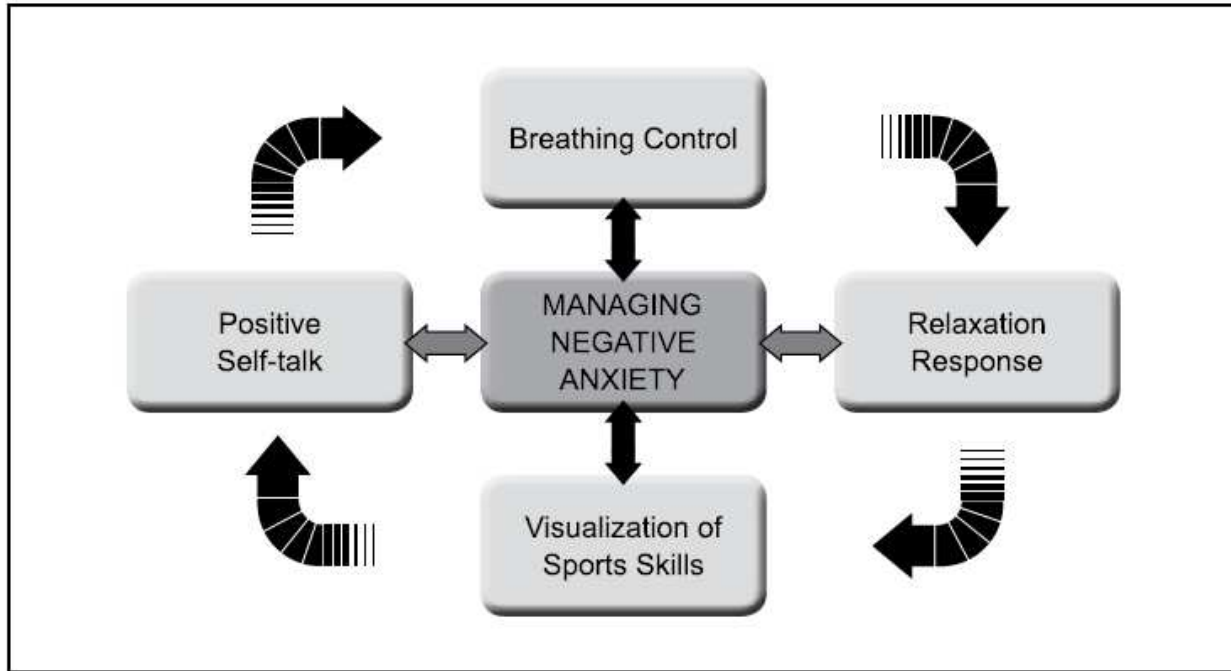
Focus and Energize

- ❑ **Phase 3:** When you are feeling relaxed and calm, imagine yourself performing your sport. You may be performing a particular move or a sequence of moves. You may be practicing or performing in a competition. You may be scoring a point or a goal, making that perfect save, or saving tackle. As you perform:
 - ✓ Focus on the image of your performance. Carefully add detail to the performance.
 - ✓ Focus externally as if watching your body perform.
 - ✓ Focus on the sounds you might hear as you perform.
 - ✓ Focus internally on getting the feeling as you perform the skill.
 - ✓ Run through your successful performance several times until you can see and feel it.
 - ✓ Shift your focus to an important external cue in the environment, e.g. the basketball rim, bull’s-eye, the opponent’s leg, the catcher’s mitt, a baseball approaching, a corner of the soccer net.
- ❑ **Phase 4:** As you perform the skill in your mind’s eye, use a positive phrase or power word to describe the performance as you see and feel yourself perform successfully.
- ❑ **Phase 5:** Run through the skill a number of times, seeing yourself perform successfully. As you perform successfully, notice the contrast in energy level between the first and last part

of this exercise.

Debrief: Skills of emotional and attentional control are mutually dependent. In other words, to relax, you have to focus, and it is important to relax if you want to focus. Similarly, to visualize, you need to focus, and it is a great asset to be able to visualize well if you want to focus on excellent performance.

Figure 4.3



4.4 Setting Goals

4.4.1 Reasons for Involvement in Sport

In general, people participate in sport for one or more of the reasons listed below. Coaches need to be able to recognize and respect individual differences in this area, because athletes drop out when programs don't match their reasons for being in sport. Put another way, coaches need to work with those they coach to give them a program that meets their needs or recommend a program that will.



Achievement-motivated athletes respond very positively to goal setting, because goal setting gives them consistent opportunities to succeed by meeting the objectives they set.

Here are a few ideas for making sure that athletes' needs for *achievement* are fulfilled:

- Point out individual improvement.
- Keep written records of progress in diaries/logs.
- Schedule competitions with suitable opponents.
- Meet regularly to discuss progress and re-evaluate goals.

4.4.2 Types of Goals

Goals are statements of what an athlete or team wants to accomplish. They provide both a sense of *purpose* and a sense of *direction* to training and competition.

Athletes will be better able to describe their goals when they ask and answer the following questions:

- What do I really want to achieve?
- How can I achieve it?
- When do I want to achieve it?

There are two main types of goals:

- Outcome goals**, which relate to outcomes
- Process goals**, which relate to process

Outcome Goals

Outcome goals are about **WHAT** you achieve.

- ❑ **Competition results** are outcomes of a team or individual sport. These results may include ranking in a league or position in an individual race. These are ABSOLUTE outcomes. Since external factors can affect the athlete's ability to achieve these goals, achieving these goals is not always within the athlete's control.
- ❑ **Self-improvement goals** are measurable changes in performance. For example, improvements in fitness levels, in race time, in peak strength, and in maximum bench press are self-improvement goals. These goals may be independent of results-type goals (e.g. you may improve your race time but not win the race); self-improvement goals may be viewed in RELATIVE terms for each athlete. Achieving self-improvement goals is usually more within the athlete's control than achieving competition results. In some sport psychology literature, self-improvement goals are referred to as *performance outcome goals*.

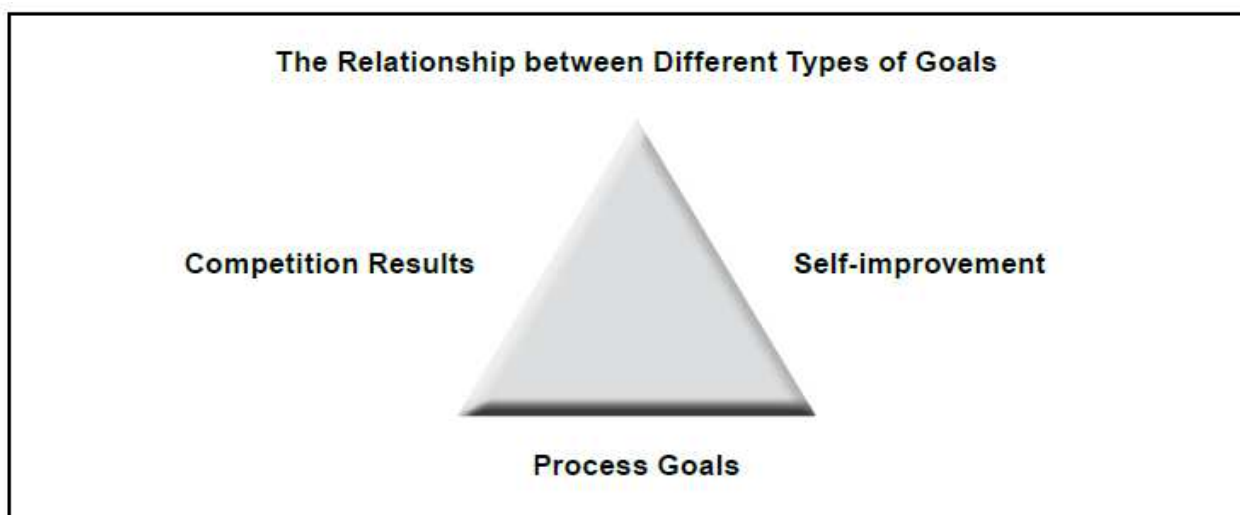
Process Goals

Process goals are about HOW you achieve goals.

- ❑ Process goals are the means by which goals are achieved, for example, achieving fitness goals by attending all practices, training five times a week, going to weekly meetings, and monitoring fitness monthly. Developing team cohesion to improve the team's standing in the league is another example of a process goal.

As shown in Figure 5.4 on the following page, outcome and, process goals are related. For example, to achieve a competition result goal (e.g. improving league ranking and finishing among the top three teams), players may have to improve their fitness (self-improvement goal) and increase the amount of training at critical times during the season (process goal).

Figure 4.4



To become really meaningful, both outcome and process goals must be related to a time period, either the long or the short term.

- ❑ **Long-term goals** are goals that are to be realized by the end of a season (or even later in some cases).

❑ **Short-term goals** are the small steps taken right away to reach the desired long-term goal. The types of goals you set and the nature of these goals varies according to the type of sport, e.g. team or individual. As well, some athletes may be part of a team, but their performance is entirely individual, e.g. downhill skiers. In this case, the team may focus on process-type goals designed to improve team atmosphere and cohesion. This creates an environment in which individual self-improvement goals may be set.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with setting long-term dream goals such as making the national team or competing at an Olympic Games. In fact, most athletes who eventually achieve this type of goal did have it as one of their dream goals in their early competitive years.

Setting long-term and short-term process goals that are both progressive and measurable makes it possible for athletes to chart a path toward a dream goal and find satisfaction and motivation along the way.

Athletes Who Use Goal Setting Effectively Tend To:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">❑ Suffer less from anxiety and stress.❑ Concentrate better on the task.❑ Show higher levels of self-belief and self-confidence.❑ Show greater control over the performance process.

4.4.3 My Starting Point

What goal setting do you currently do with the athletes you coach? When do you do it?

WHAT I DO	HOW AND WHEN I DO IT
E.g., Ask team what they want to achieve	E.g., How – Team meeting
When – before the season starts	

Use the table below to list some examples of the goals you've set with your athletes. Or think about goals you've set for yourself in your personal or professional life. In doing this, try to think about (1) the type of goal you set, (2) the climate in which you set the goal(s), and (3) the information you needed to be able to set the goals.

Goal	Type of Goal (Check One)	Climate Necessary to Set This Goal	Information Needed to Set This Goal
E.g., Team Goal: We want to place 3rd or higher in the league standings so that we make the playoffs	<input type="checkbox"/> This goal is about a result <input type="checkbox"/> This goal is about self improvement <input type="checkbox"/> This goal is about how I want to execute	Done as a team at a team meeting; all players must feel as if they have a say in the goal and must buy into it individually and together	Past experiences and standings for this team and for other teams that will be in the league this year
	<input type="checkbox"/> This goal is about a result <input type="checkbox"/> This goal is about self improvement <input type="checkbox"/> This goal is about how I want to execute		
	<input type="checkbox"/> This goal is about a result <input type="checkbox"/> This goal is about self improvement <input type="checkbox"/> This goal is about how I want to execute		
	<input type="checkbox"/> This goal is about a result <input type="checkbox"/> This goal is about self improvement <input type="checkbox"/> This goal is about how I want to execute		

Now, take one of the goals you identified in 4.4.3. Using the process below, go through each step in detail and clarify what your goal is really about, how you will know that it has been achieved, and how you will go about achieving it.

Step of the Goal-setting Process	Detailing the Goal
<p>Step 1- Establish the goal and commit to it (i.e., what needs to be accomplished, and why is this important?)</p> <p>E.g., (Ski racer) - Improve race start, because you can win or lose a race in the first 25 m as a result of the quality of start.</p>	
<p>Step 2- State the goal clearly in terms of performance or outcome.</p> <p>E.g., Cut one 1 second of time from tripping wand to 10 m by January 1.</p>	
<p>Step 3- Identify indicators of success (i.e. what evidence is needed to say the goal has been achieved?)</p> <p>E.g., Time starts on first day of training in October. Timed starts in training for Nov, .5 seconds less; timed starts in Dec, .75 seconds less; start time Jan 1, one second less than in October.</p>	
<p>Step 4- Identify specific strategies to achieve the goal (i.e. what must be done to achieve this goal, and how will this be done?)</p> <p>E.g., Build a permanent practice start ramp; video starts, detect and correct technique; build upper-body strength.</p>	

4.4.4 Helping Athletes Set Effective Goals

Gathering the following information is a necessary first step in effective goal setting:

- Current status of the athlete/team (i.e. what is today's performance level?).
- Record of previous performances by this athlete/team.
- Age-group norms for this event/sport.
- Training time available.
- Type of competitions available.
- Type of competitors available.
- Performance improvement possible for this age group during a specific period of time (this is hard for novice coaches to gauge — if you're not sure of this, consult expert coaches for the age group you are working with).
- Growth and development considerations for this age group.

Remember that you are to be a *facilitator* in your athletes' goal setting. For athletes to take ownership of goals and to feel motivated to achieve them, the athletes themselves must set the goals. Once you gather the information above, you can support your athletes as they set measurable, achievable goals.

Payoffs from Collaborative Goal Setting

- Goals and priorities are clearer.
- Commitment and motivation increase.
- The definition of success is clearer.
- Athletes' confidence and sense of accomplishment increase, and morale improves.
- Coping mechanisms improve because goal setting helps keep winning and losing in perspective and helps athletes manage challenges one step at a time.
- Athletes mature by taking increased responsibility for their directions.
- Problem behaviour decreases as self-responsibility increases.
- Athletes develop an appreciation for goal setting as they benefit from achieving their goals; this often transfers into other areas of life.
- Athletes show increased empathy for the needs and rights of others on the team.
- Communication improves, as goal setting provides a forum to express needs and desires related to sport performance.
- Athletes are happier and have more fun, because having fun in sport is usually directly linked with feeling successful and meeting challenges.
- Athletes perform better because they have achievable, challenging targets to aim for together and individually.

4.4.5 Sample Goal Setting

This section outlines a *collaborative goal-setting process* that coaches and athletes might use. It can be used for individual or team goals.

The steps in this process are as follows:

- Establish the importance or meaning of the individual or team experience
- Identify areas that need work, and do this in terms of outcome or process goals
- Specify goals for the season/year
- Determine the criteria for success
- Develop a road map for success
- Develop a monitoring and evaluation process

The table below provides an example of how to apply this process to team goal setting.

Goal-Setting Steps	Notes
<p>1. Establish the importance or meaning of the individual or team experience.</p> <p>Question: What does it mean to be a part of this team or this group?</p>	<p>Athletes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Reflect on the importance of being involved in the team. <input type="checkbox"/> Are invited to share their thoughts and feelings with the group. <p>Coach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> May model if necessary. <p>Rationale: A mutual awareness of the relevance of the team experience may increase cohesion and commitment.</p>

Goal-Setting Steps	Notes
<p>2. Identify areas that need work.</p> <p>Question: What evidence is there that we need to work on X and Y?</p>	<p>Identify whether the issues raised apply to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Competition results, e.g. position of team in the league <input type="checkbox"/> Self-improvement goals, e.g. personal fitness level or performance level <input type="checkbox"/> Process goals, e.g. the way results are achieved <p>Identify whether the team needs to work on physical conditioning or on technical, tactical, or mental skills.</p> <p>Highlight the relationship between outcome and process goals.</p> <p>Rationale: It is important to identify whether goals are related to ongoing behaviours of team members or to outcomes, such as championships.</p>
<p>3. Specify goals for the season/year.</p> <p>Question: What exactly do we want to achieve this year?</p>	<p>Clearly identify goals. Note whether the goals are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Competition results <input type="checkbox"/> Self-improvement goals <input type="checkbox"/> Process goals <input type="checkbox"/> Long-term goals <input type="checkbox"/> Short-term goals <p>The team “signs off” on the goals, and the goals are posted for the team to see.</p> <p>Rationale: Specifying and recording goals and signing off on them is a public record of team commitment.</p>

Goal-Setting Steps	Notes
<p>4. Determine criteria for success.</p> <p>Question: How will we know we have achieved our goals?</p>	<p>Develop a list of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Outcome criteria —changes the team wants to see in performance or results <input type="checkbox"/> Process criteria — behaviours the team will have to observe to know it's on track <p>Rationale: Establishing clear criteria for success is important. It allows team members to self- monitor and to recognize whether goals are being met.</p>
<p>5. Develop a road map for success</p> <p>Question: What behaviours/actions are necessary for us to achieve these goals?</p>	<p>The team brainstorms to come up with strategies for achieving its goals (outcome or process).</p> <p>Be very specific about the strategies, and record them.</p> <p>Rationale: Knowing where you want to be is only one part of the puzzle. Establishing a road map for success is critical to setting and achieving goals.</p>
<p>6. Develop a monitoring and evaluation process.</p> <p>Questions: How will we know ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> We're on track? <input type="checkbox"/> We're achieving our goals? <input type="checkbox"/> If we need to adjust our goals? 	<p>Coaches design a monitoring and evaluation process. It could, for example, involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Observing athlete behaviour <input type="checkbox"/> Holding regular team meetings <input type="checkbox"/> Conducting regular fitness or skill assessments <input type="checkbox"/> Integrating mental-skill simulations into practices <p>Rationale: Establishing a way of monitoring and evaluating progress is critical for motivating athletes and for adjusting goals when necessary.</p>

4.5 Planning for Mental Preparation

4.5.1 Seasonal Road Maps

To help you complete the exercise below, you may want to use some of the following terms (explanations in brackets) in the following table as you consider managing focus and negative anxiety, as well as goal setting:

Managing Focus and Anxiety	Goal Setting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Introduce skill <input type="checkbox"/> Develop athlete awareness <input type="checkbox"/> Develop skill <input type="checkbox"/> Refine skill <input type="checkbox"/> Simulation (apply basic skills to sport context) <input type="checkbox"/> Develop performance routines (integrate mental skills into performance preparation routines or 'rituals') <input type="checkbox"/> Refine performance routines <input type="checkbox"/> Implement performance routines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Team meeting <input type="checkbox"/> Identify goals <input type="checkbox"/> Set outcome goals (competition results/self improvement) <input type="checkbox"/> Set process goals <input type="checkbox"/> Set individual goals <input type="checkbox"/> Set team goals <input type="checkbox"/> Monitor <input type="checkbox"/> Assess <input type="checkbox"/> Re-evaluate

Mental Skill	Time of the Season		
	Beginning	Middle	End
Goal Setting			
Managing Focus			
Managing Negative Anxiety			

4.5.2 Planning for Mental Preparation Within a Season

While there are no hard-and-fast rules about when to develop mental skills within a season, there are some widely accepted general guidelines.

Mental Skill	Time of the Season			
	Beginning	Middle	Around Key Competitions	End
Setting Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Team meeting <input type="checkbox"/> Identify goals <input type="checkbox"/> Set goals <input type="checkbox"/> Outcome goals (What do we/I want to achieve?) <input type="checkbox"/> Process goals (How do we/I achieve these goals?) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Monitor <input type="checkbox"/> Assess <input type="checkbox"/> Re-evaluate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Re-evaluate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Team Meeting <input type="checkbox"/> Debrief <input type="checkbox"/> Re-evaluate
Managing Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Introduce skill <input type="checkbox"/> Develop athlete awareness <input type="checkbox"/> Develop basic skill <input type="checkbox"/> Assess basic skills <input type="checkbox"/> Refine basic skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Simulation <input type="checkbox"/> Develop performance routines <input type="checkbox"/> Refine performance routines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Refine performance routines <input type="checkbox"/> Implement (performance routines) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Debrief

Managing Negative Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Introduce skill <input type="checkbox"/> Develop athlete awareness <input type="checkbox"/> Develop basic skill <input type="checkbox"/> Assess basic skills <input type="checkbox"/> Refine basic skill 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Simulation <input type="checkbox"/> Develop performance routines <input type="checkbox"/> Refine performance routines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Refine performance routines <input type="checkbox"/> Implement (performance routines) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Debrief
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4.5.3 Planning for Mental Preparation Within a Practice

As was the case for planning for mental preparation within a season, there are no hard-and-fast rules for when to develop mental skills within a practice. And just as was the case for planning for mental preparation within a season, there are some widely accepted general guidelines.

There are of course many more options, and the key to successful mental training is to find creative ways to integrate it into your day-to-day practices so that it becomes a habit for athletes.

During the Introduction

- Allow a few minutes for chatting so that athletes can start to focus on the practice.
- Gauge arousal level, and do relaxation or energizing exercises if necessary.
- Set goals for the practice, or remind athletes of their goals for the practice.
- Provide a visual of drills/games that athletes will do during the main part. This helps athletes start to create visual images. Have athletes rehearse what they will be doing (e.g. sprint straight, cut left, turn, and receive).

During the Warm-up

- To stimulate shifts in focus, include a variety of activities that change frequently.
- Make the movements of the specific warm up similar to the movements that athletes will perform in the main part. That way, athletes can get a feel for what they'll be doing while they're visualizing it.
- Check with individual athletes to make sure they understand their goals for the practice.
- Set cue words for the activities/drills.

During the Main Part

- Gauge arousal level and focus before each new activity/drill.
- Ask athletes to visualize successful performance of an activity or drill while waiting for a turn or recovering.
- Say cue words before and during each attempt, and ask athletes to do the same.
- Ask athletes to refocus and visualize after each attempt, especially to re-instill a successful image after a failed attempt.
- Videotape athletes to show them their successful performances and to create images of positive accomplishments.

During the Cool-down

- Include relaxation, and return to calm exercises.
- Check if individual and group goals for the practice were met.

During the Conclusion

- Check if individual and group goals for the practice were met.
- Ask athletes what went well and what needs improvement.
- Set goals for the next practice/competition.

4.5.4 Practice Planning Worksheet

DATE: _____ TIME from: _____ to: _____

LOCATION: _____

GOAL(S): _____

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: _____

Introduction		Key messages/safety points
Warm up	Include general and specific warm-up	Key messages/safety points
		Equipment needed
Main part	Pay attention to the order of the activities	Key messages/safety points
		Equipment needed
Cool down		Key messages/safety points
Conclusion		Key messages/safety points

4.6 Basic Mental Skills: Self- Assessment

This self-assessment will allow you to reflect on your current coaching practices. The items that are listed in the self-assessment are the evidences that an Evaluator will be looking for during assignments and observations. They will help determine if you have the required abilities/competencies. The self-assessment form will help you identify areas of strength and areas for improvement.

Rate your ability to support your athletes' use of basic mental skills in competition. For each statement presented below, circle the number that best represents whether you achieve the statement (Never, Sometimes, Often, Always).

I help my athletes prepare mentally for competition by...	Never	Some-times	Often	Always
Recognizing that mental skills have a critical impact on competitive performance	1	2	3	4
Identifying the type of focus my athletes' sport requires	1	2	3	4
Identifying distractions that may occur in the competitive environment	1	2	3	4
Running practices that help my athletes shift focus	1	2	3	4
Running practices that require my athletes to attend to the right things at the right time	1	2	3	4
Running practices that require my athletes to deal with distractions that could occur during competition	1	2	3	4
Developing strategies that help athletes manage their focus	1	2	3	4
Observing athletes to assess their state of anxiety before competition	1	2	3	4
Working with athletes so they achieve an optimal mental state for competition	1	2	3	4
Running practices that challenge athletes to cope with negative anxiety during competition	1	2	3	4

I help my athletes prepare mentally for competition by...	Never	Some-times	Often	Always
Teaching athletes how to use goal-setting strategies to enhance competitive performance	1	2	3	4
Encouraging athletes to reflect on the types of goals they set, the climate in which they set goals, and the information needed to set goals	1	2	3	4
Designing a strategy to monitor or measure performance factors that identify goal attainment	1	2	3	4
Helping my athletes set appropriate performance goals	1	2	3	4
Helping athletes decide how to measure progress toward their goals	1	2	3	4
Helping athletes implement a strategy to achieve their goals	1	2	3	4
Helping athletes design a pre-competitive plan that specifies how to prepare mentally for competition	1	2	3	4
Ensuring that each athlete's pre-competitive plan identifies specific goals and objectives for competition	1	2	3	4
Ensuring that the athlete's pre-competitive plan includes a pre-competition checklist	1	2	3	4

DATE: _____

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