



Mental Focus

Mental Focus, or concentration, refers to the ability of an individual to direct mental effort on the most relevant information in the environment.

Why is mental focus important?

Because our ability to stay focused on the relevant cues in our environment during competition is often the critical factor for success.

It's critical that an athlete be able to concentrate during difficult situations such as adverse crowd conditions, bad officiating, or irrelevant thoughts.

Loss of concentration can be categorized two ways:

INTERNAL DISTRACTIONS

- Worrying about past events (e.g. can't let the past go)
- Worrying about the future (e.g. worrying about the outcome)
- Overanalyzing body mechanics (e.g. paralysis from analysis)
- Lack of motivation (e.g. rather be somewhere else)
- Fatigue (e.g. too tired to think straight)

EXTERNAL DISTRACTIONS

- Visual (e.g. watching what's going on in the stands)
- Auditory (e.g. crowd noise)
- Gamesmanship (e.g. when your opponent is talking smack)

Mental Focus is a skill; therefore it can be improved with practice. Practice attending to relevant cues while ignoring irrelevant cues once distracted and your ability to refocus will improve.

To improve mental focus, you need to identify whether the distraction is internal or external. Then, for:

INTERNAL DISTRACTIONS

- Practice positive self-talk
 - Keep it optimistic, short, & specific
 - Use the first person & present tense
- Use cue words that trigger instructional thought or motivation
- Develop routines to direct attention to appropriate cues
- Establish a competition plan to maintain mental focus

EXTERNAL DISTRACTIONS

Physical practice, overlearn the skills

Practice eye control, your attention will go where you are looking

Simulate game conditions when you practice

Use imagery to simulate game conditions and possible obstacles