Chapter 16: Concentration

What Is Concentration?
Types of Attentional Focus
Shifting Attentional Focus
Attentional Problems
Choking as an Attentional Problem
Self-Talk
Assessing Attentional Skills
Tips for Improving Concentration On Site
Exercises to Improve Concentration

What Is Concentration?
Focus on relevant environmental cues.
Maintaining attentional focus.
Situation awareness.

Types of Attentional Focus

Key
Several types of attentional focus are appropriate for specific sport skills & activities.

Four Different types of Attentional Focus
1. Broad-Internal
Used to analyze and plan (e.g., developing a game plan or strategy)

2. Narrow-Internal
Used to mentally rehearse an upcoming performance or control an emotional state (e.g., mentally rehearse golf putting or taking a breath to relax)

3. Broad-External
Used to rapidly assess a situation (e.g., a football quarterback rapidly assesses the positioning of the defensive backs)

4. Narrow-External
Used to focus exclusively on one or two external cues (e.g., the ball)

Shifting Attentional Focus
When the environment changes rapidly, attentional focus must also change rapidly.

Attentional Problems

Internal Distractors
Attending to past events (e.g., What was?)
Attending to future events (e.g., What if?)
Attending to too many cues
Overanalysis of body mechanics

External Distractors
Visual Distractors
Auditory Distractors
Gamesmanship

**Choking**
An attentional process that leads to impaired performance and the inability to retain control over performance without outside assistance

**The Choking Process**

**Conditions leading to choking**
1. Important competition
2. Critical plays in a competition
3. Evaluation by coaches, peers, and parents

**Physical changes**
1. Increased muscle tension
2. Increased breathing rate
3. Racing heart rate

**Attentional changes**
1. Internal focus
2. Narrow focus
3. Reduced flexibility

**Performance impairment**
1. Timing and coordination breakdown
2. Muscle tightness and fatigue
3. Rushing
4. Inability to attend to task-relevant cues

**Self-Talk**
Any self-statement or thought

**How self-talk works (the process)**

**Uses of self-talk**
- skill acquisition
- breaking bad habits
- initiating action
- sustaining effort

**Event (environmental stimulation)**
- Missing an important shot in a tennis match
- A setback in rehabilitating a knee injury
**Self-talk (perception/evaluation)**

"What an idiot I am. I'll never win now."
"Keep your eye on the ball. This match isn't over."
"I'll never get back in the starting lineup."
"This type of injury just takes time to heal, so I need to continue to work hard."

**Response (emotional, physiological, behavioral)**

Anger, hopelessness, increased muscle tension
Better concentration, optimism, calmness
Hopelessness, anger, frustration
Optimism, motivation, increased effort
Changing self-talk
thought stopping
changing negative self-talk to positive self-talk

**Assessing Attentional Skills**

Use the Test of Attention & Interpersonal Style (TAIS)
Observation (e.g., Behavioral analysis)
Psychophysiological Measures (e.g., EEG, HR)

**Effective versus ineffective attentional styles:**
Effective attenders can attend to several stimuli without getting over loaded and can narrow attentional focus without leaving out important information.
Ineffective attenders are easily confused with multiple stimuli.

TAIS as a trait measure:
The TAIS is a general trait measure. Sport-specific measures also exist. The TAIS is not without problems.

**Tips for Improving Concentration on Site**

1. Practice with distractions present.
2. Use cue words to focus (instructional & motivational words).
3. Employ nonjudgmental thinking.
4. Establish routines
5. Develop competitive plans
6. Practice eye control.
7. Stay focused in the present.
8. Overlearn skills.

**Sport Specific Examples of Performance Routines**

**Golf shot**

1. Take a deep breath.
2. Look at the fairway lie and assess the weather conditions and possible hazards.
3. Look at the target and decide on the shot required.
4. Picture your target and the shot you want to hit. Imagine not only your swing but also the
trajectory of the ball and its final resting place.
5. Address the ball, adjusting and readjusting your position until you feel comfortable.
6. Feel the shot with your whole body.
7. Again picture the desired shot and, while feeling the shot, think target 8. Think target and swing.

_Tennis serve_
1. Determine positioning and foot placement.
2. Decide on service type and placement.
3. Adjust racquet grip and ball.
4. Take a deep breath.
5. Bounce the ball for rhythm.
6. See and feel the perfect serve.
7. Focus on ball toss and serve to programmed spot.

_Exercises to Improve Concentration_
1. Learn to shift motivation.
2. Learn to maintain focus.
3. Search for relevant cues.
4. Rehearse game concentration.

_Distorted Thinking and Self-Talk (Chapters 14 and 16)_

_Irrational Beliefs_
No pain, no gain.
Give 110% all the time.
Practice makes perfect.
Winning isn’t everything, it’s the only thing.

_What are Cognitive Strategies?_
_Cognitive Strategies_ are techniques that focus on thoughts and their influence on behavior.

_Why use Cognitive Strategies in Sport?_
Changing the way one thinks about a situation or one’s outlook can lead to a positive effect on sport enjoyment and performance.

Activity: Identifying irrational or ineffective thoughts
Try to remember something you have said to yourself before, during, or after sports participation. Note your answers to the following 5 questions.

_Identifying irrational or ineffective thoughts:_
Is the belief based on objective reality?
Is it helpful?
Is it used in reducing interpersonal conflicts?
Does it help in reaching goals?
Does it reduce emotional conflict?
Irrational or Ineffective Beliefs:
If the answer to any of the previous 5 questions was "no", the belief you had may have hindered your athletic performance in some way.

Distorted Thinking Styles
Perfectionism
Catastrophizing
Self-worth depends on achievement
Personalization
Fallacy of fairness
Blaming
Polarized thinking
One-trial generalizations

Changing Irrational Thoughts
Thought Stoppage
Changing Negative Thoughts to Positive
Developing Positive Affirmations
Countering
Reframing
Cognitive Restructuring

Self-Talk
Any self-statement or thought
Techniques used to identify self-talk:
Retrospection - remembering the feelings and thoughts associated with very good or very poor performances.
Imagery - reliving and re-creating past performances can increase awareness of self-talk usage.
Observation - watching or recording performances is helpful for those who verbalize or display their thoughts and feelings externally.
Self-talk logs - keeping a daily record or journal to keep track of self-statements, their triggers, and the resulting consequences or outcomes.

Why Use Positive Self-Talk?
Positive self-talk enhances self-esteem, motivation, attentional focus, and performance. Negative self-talk is counterproductive and usually causes anxiety which gets in the way of reaching goals. Positive self-talk helps you focus on the present and keep your mind from wandering.

Uses of Positive Self-Talk
Learning new skills
Breaking bad habits
Initiate action
Sustain effort

Key:
Use positive cue words to focus your attention on producing a successful performance.
Developing Positive Affirmations
List positive statements that represent
past performance and effort
personal abilities and/or characteristics
aspects of skills, training, and personal beliefs
Repeat the affirmation on a regular basis
Use them in training and during competition
May want to periodically change them to keep them fresh for maintaining focus
Keep doing affirmations even when your positive

Thought Stoppage
Develop an awareness of the unwanted thought(s).
Create a trigger to interrupt or stop the counterproductive thought(s). This trigger can be a
verbal response
visual picture
physical action

Countering
Create an internal debate
Develop an awareness of the self-defeating thought(s)
Gather evidence from a variety of reliable sources to refute the self-defeating thoughts or
negative belief.

Reframing
I’m going to embarrass myself against this higher ranked opponent.
I’m going to see how good I’ve gotten and where I need improvement

Define key terms and answer review questions

Review for Final

Some Key Terms/Concepts
Trait-State Sport Confidence Inventory
anxiety reduction techniques
arousal inducing techniques
autogenic training (Schultz & Luthe)
biofeedback (Daniels & Landers)
breath control
cognitive affective stress
stress management training (Smith)
imagery evaluation
imagery training/programs
internal & external imagery
progressive relaxation (Jacobson)
psychological skills hypothesis
Psychological Skills Inventory for Sport (PSIS)
PST programs
psychoneuromuscular theory
ideo-motor principle
relaxation response (Benson)
relaxation tips
self-awareness of arousal
self-confidence
self-esteem
self-efficacy theory (Bandura)
sources of efficacy
self-expectations
systematic desensitization (Wolpe)
coach expectations
self-fulfilling prophesy
benefits of confidence
optimal confidence
goal setting
objective goals vs. subjective goals
outcome goals vs. performance goals
goal setting principles
goal setting staircase
concentration
attentional strategies
dissociation & association
cue words
self-talk
Nideffer's TAIS
The choking process
techniques to improve self-talk
routines
nonjudgmental thinking
eye control
focused in the present
attentional shifting
grid concentration

{ Read the Review Questions }
1. Provide 2 techniques for improving self-talk.
2. Give 6 on-site tips for improving concentration.
3. Compare and contrast Symbolic Learning Theory and Psychoneuromuscular Theory as they relate to imagery.
4. Why do players and coaches neglect PST?
5. Why does goal setting work?
6. Identify five common problems with goal setting.
7. Describe Bandura's self-efficacy theory as it relates to athletic performance.
8. Provide an example of Nideffer's Broad-Internal type of attentional focus.

*Research to know*
Orlick & Partington (Canadian's mental preparation)
Suinn - skier's legs (imagery)
Feltz & Landers (imagery rehearsal)
Vealey (psychological interventions)
Greenspan & Feltz (PST effectiveness)
Mahoney & Avener (expectations)
Nelson & Furst (arm wrestling and expectations)
Rosenthal & Jacobson (teacher expectancies)
Gould (detailed plans)
Burton (basketball skills and goal setting)
Nideffer (attentional focus)