

## COMPONENTS OF MENTAL TOUGHNESS

1. Self-Awareness
2. Performance Journaling
3. Goal Setting
4. Concentration & Focusing
5. Performing Under Pressure/Adversity
6. Imagery/Visualization
7. Energy Management
8. Pre-Performance Routines
9. Positive Self-Talk
10. Confronting Fears

### Optimal Performance Consulting

*Sam Maniar, Ph.D.* is the President and founder of Optimal Performance Consulting. He has worked with amateur, collegiate, Olympic, and professional athletes and teams. He is available for sport & business consultation/workshops.

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# Optimal Performance Newsletter

## Developing Mental Toughness: Part I

### **Self-Awareness**

*Sam Maniar, Ph.D.*

In addition to motivation, I am frequently asked about the topic of “mental toughness.” It seems that you cannot watch a sporting event on television anymore without hearing some mention of mental toughness or being mentally tough.

Here are some typical questions that are sent to me via the OPC website. Why do some players always seem to have a good work ethic and why do others seem lazy? What are the differences between athletes or employees who are quick to blame others as compared to those who always look to take responsibility themselves?

Ultimately, these individuals were asking what could be done to help improve competition under pressure/adversity and also how to strengthen a person’s work ethic and/or increase a person’s level of self-responsibility. I have a simple answer, but unfortunately, it takes some difficult mental training on the part of the athlete.

## **Mental Toughness**

In asking the questions about work ethic and performing under pressure, the individuals were referring to the same thing: mental toughness. I like to define mental toughness as *performing at your optimal level regardless of circumstances*. Some athletes are more mentally tough than others.

Although a portion of mental toughness is based on genetics (natural ability), a large part of mental toughness is dependent upon the environment in which a person is raised. Parents (and bosses) who are unconditionally supportive and allow their children to fail will be more likely to have mentally tough children.

But ... it’s not that simple. In order to be truly mentally tough, an athlete or businessperson must continue to alter his or her environment through a sound mental training program. This may seem obvious because in order to be physically strong, an athlete must have a sound physical training program. Nevertheless, few athletes, teams, and businesses take the time to train mentally.

I have already addressed components of mental toughness in previous newsletters: goal

setting, focusing, preventing choking, and imagery/visualization. Over the next several newsletters, I will address additional components of mental toughness. Some of these topics will include managing energy (pumping up and calming down), establishing and maintaining pre-competition routines, confronting fears, and improving self-talk. In this newsletter, though, I will address the foundation to all of the other skills mentioned above: self-awareness.

**Self-Awareness**

Self-awareness can be defined in numerous ways in philosophy and psychology, but for our purpose, let's define self-awareness as *being in tune with oneself both physically and mentally, and knowing how to regain equilibrium when something is out of balance.* In other words, an athlete with self-awareness knows when something feels wrong and knows how to fix it.

The first part of developing self-awareness is reflecting back upon your best and worst performances. For example: What mental state were you in before and during the game/presentation? What did your warm-up involve? How high would you rate your energy level before the game/presentation? Did you do anything special before the game/meeting? Did someone say something to you that helped or

hurt you? Were you physically relaxed? Were you mentally calm? What was your anxiety level like? How optimistic did you feel throughout your performance? Were you having fun? Did you have to work hard or did it feel effortless? Were you alert? Focused? Confident? In control? Why or why not?

The best clue to future successes will always be your past successes.

**Performance Journaling**

The second part of self-awareness involves keeping a journal or performance log. These records should be kept for practices as well as games. Reflecting on any of the above questions/categories are a good start, but feel free to add your own areas of reflection. Once you have kept a journal for some time, you will start to see patterns emerge and will then know what mental and physical state is best for you to enhance your mental toughness. (Remember, everyone is different.)

In subsequent newsletters, we will work on how to improve your mental and physical state should you find that it is not where it needs to be on a given day. Until then, happy journaling!

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