

The Courage to Win™ in Sport: Perform Your Best Under Pressure 30 Day Advanced HOME STUDY Program with Lisa Lane Brown

Lesson 1 Breakthrough Confidence The Most Important Skill You Will Ever Learn As An Athlete

You are about to discover a practical formula for reaching your potential as an athlete. Now, for the first time, there is a proven mental toughness formula for performing your best under pressure.

Today is the dawn of a new era for you. Your confidence will grow, your skills will improve, and your performance anxiety will fade. You will think competing is easier, but it will be you who has changed. Here are typical problems athletes have shared with me over the years:

- “I’m afraid of choking under pressure.”*
- “Ever since I lost my last competition, I’ve been filled with self-doubt.”*
- “I can’t shake the fear inside me when I compete.”*
- “I can’t please my father no matter what I do.”*
- “My coach favours my teammate over me.”*
- “I’ve lost my motivation in training.”*
- “My doubles partner yells at me.”*
- “Opponents always psyche me out.”*
- “I hate performing in my home city.”*
- “I lack discipline.”*

What is Mental Toughness?

Mental Toughness Action Assignment 1

What is your personal definition of mental toughness? Describe a time when you displayed it in your sport.

We define mental toughness as the ability to “perform your best under pressure.”

Great athletes are not people who perform well under pressure.
Nobody performs well under pressure.

Great athletes are people who create an internal environment for themselves in which they do not feel overwhelming pressure.

What all athletes (including your competitors) are doing is focusing on winning. They’re wondering how they can look good to spectators, coaches, and teammates. They’re wondering how to stop themselves from choking. Most of all, they’re wondering how to avoid losing.

These impulses are a big disadvantage to winning. They are a big disadvantage because they put pressure on you by creating fear, because you cannot control any of these things.

Your edge will come from approaching your competition differently than your opponents.

There’s a lot that goes into developing your inner game so you can believe at a profound level in your athletic self, psyche up for your event the day of, and be resilient in the face of adversity, setbacks, and challenges during your event

Basketball superstar Michael Jordan admits how hard it can be to open his mind to new ‘inner game’ ways. When his coach, Phil Jackson, brought in a sports psychologist to teach the team about getting in the zone, Michael thought it was crazy: “When we first started meditating before practice, I’m closing one eye and keeping the other eye open to see what other fool is doing this beside me.”

Eventually, Michael dropped his pride and opened his mind: “I became more accepting because I could see everyone making an effort. I opened my mind to these teachings.”¹ Michael opened his mind because he is a winner. We can do the same.

Why Do We Need Mental Toughness?

All sport is led by the mind.

This is why mental toughness separates athletes who reach their potential from those who do not. At the highest levels of sport now, the difference between success and failure is as thin as a razor’s edge. Swimming is a good example.

Mark Tewksbury, one of the finest athletes Canada has ever produced, noticed this in Barcelona in 1992:

...the world had become much more competitive. The medals, which used to be shared by 8 countries, were now finding their way to more than 25 nations. This made a big impact on me. On the first day of swimming I was shocked by the results. Because it was so close and there were so many surprises, it became clear that anything could happen.

On the second day of the swimming...there was another close race at the pool and I thought to myself, 'Hmm, silver would be good.' I wasn't giving up but it was so close there were absolutely no guarantees. Even legends like Matt Biondi, the world record holder in the 100-metre freestyle, were leaving the pool without going to podium. It seemed as though it would be a feat simply to win any medal.²

Why Winning Matters

The purpose of life is happiness. This much is clear.³

What is not clear is the relationship between winning and happiness. How does winning make you happier? Your current desire to win represents the next stage in your evolution. What you want, right now, is moving you to the next phase in your development as an athlete and a person.⁴

To attain your desires in sport, you must become an athlete worthy of them.² To win in sport, you need skill, fitness, strategy, and mental toughness under pressure. Your desire to win, right now, is pushing you the next level of your evolution as an athlete. Your desire to win will prompt you to develop a deeper grasp of the fundamentals, to become fitter, to acquire a better strategic grasp of your sport, and to learn how to bring out your best under pressure. Your desire to win is causing you to “max out”.

The opposite of winning is failure. Every time you fail with a person or goal, you question your capability as a human being. You feel bitter, distrustful, and angry. Continued losing undermines your self-esteem.⁵

Most human misery, including today's epidemic of depression, stems from not realizing our deepest aspirations. There is much suppressed sadness in the heart over broken dreams and relationships.

This is why winning matters. It is about becoming the kind of athlete who can succeed in what matters to you. Your self-esteem, including your personal confidence, depends on your ability to evolve. In the end, what we are really seeking is love, especially self-love.⁶ Love in all its forms is the highest form of winning.

The bottom line? Mastering your mental game helps you enjoy sport more, helps you win, and helps you become the very best athlete and person you can be.

Inner Barriers to Success

The starting point of mental toughness is realizing that the barriers to success lie within us. To develop superior mental skills, you need to train your mind and heart in the practices of mental toughness. The Dala Lama is an example of a person with a trained mind. He is content because he has been studying the path to enlightenment since the age of six.

Training Objective

The objective of this Advanced HOME STUDY Program is to learn the mental toughness formula you can use to perform your best under pressure and reach your potential as an athlete. This formula consists of four pillars:

1. Breakthrough Confidence - The Most Important Skill You'll Ever Learn As An Athlete
2. GAME FACE - How To Psyche Up The Day Of Your Event
3. The Comeback Kid - How To Be Resilient In The Face of Adversity and Challenges
4. The Art of Leadership: How To Create Trust And Respect With Teammates, Coaches, And Support Staff

Breakthrough Confidence – The Most Important Skill You Will Ever Learn As An Athlete

The most important skill you'll ever learn as an athlete is how to create breakthrough confidence for yourself.

What is Confidence?

Confidence is the belief that you can cope with the challenges of competition and fulfill your desires. It is a profound belief in your athletic self. The opposite of confidence is fear.

When you are confident, you BELIEVE in your athletic self. You have the conviction that you can do it - you can win. You might not always win, but you believe in your heart of hearts that you can, and this keeps you *aggressive* and gives you the *will to win*. When you are fearful instead of confident, you are passive.

You Do Not Choose Confidence

There is one crucial thing you must understand about confidence. It's this: *you do not choose confidence*.

What could this statement possibly mean?

It means that athletes don't feel confident because they *decide* to feel it. If you reflect on your competing experience for a moment and are brutally honest with yourself, you'll see that there are times when you've been able to summon confidence easily.

But, there are just as many times that you've asked yourself for confidence and you could NOT summon it 'at will.' I mean, if you could just *decide* to feel confident, you would not be doing mental toughness training. You would simply decide to feel confident and from now on -- 100% of the time -- you would feel confident every time you compete.

This is why we say that *you do not choose confidence*.

A good analogy is health. You cannot choose health either. You cannot go after health directly. You cannot get up in the morning and say, 'Today I'm going to be perfectly healthy.' Health is a *by-product* of other things such as eating well, exercising, handling stress, and getting plenty of sleep.

Virtually every athlete tries to gain confidence by trying to CONTROL. And this is what your competitors are doing: they're trying to control the outcome. They're obsessed with winning, which is an outcome. They're thinking about how to perform well and look good, which is an outcome. They're especially obsessed with not choking, or being confident—which is also an outcome.

Maybe you've been there yourself. I know I have. Many, many times. Here are some of the signs of an athlete trying to control:

1. He interferes with his technique rather than letting his body lead. If he's a golfer, he'll try to guide and steer the ball, which messes up his strokes and erodes his game. If he's a basketball player, he'll try to 'do it all himself' and drive to the basket every time instead of reading the defense. If she's a swimmer, she'll focus on her opponent instead of executing her own race plan.

2. He goes after confidence directly by telling himself to be confident. You pressure yourself to be emotionally perfect. He wants himself to be calm, cool, and collected at all times, even when it's natural for him to be a little nervous or frustrated. Anytime he isn't feeling 100% confident, he becomes unglued about his mental game.
3. Your pressure your teammates to play better, you pressure your coach to make changes, and you pressure the officials to shape up. He takes his focus off the event and puts it on stuff he can't control.

Mental Toughness Action Assignment 2

In the space below, write down ways you try to control the outcome, e.g., trying to end a rally by scoring a point.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

So the opposite of confidence is trying to CONTROL - your performance, winning, and your emotional state.

This will make you extremely anxious, and you'll quickly become clumsy, make mistakes, and become frustrated. This happens because you are sending yourself the message that you (and your body) cannot be trusted. In fact, you're actually overriding your natural ability to *express* yourself in your sport.

Now, does this mean that you cannot influence your confidence?

Not at all. While you cannot choose confidence, you can easily cultivate it if you know its true source. But before we get to the source of confidence, we need to understand the root cause of fear.

The Root Cause of Fear The Discovery Of Learned Helplessness

Fear is desire contaminated by helplessness. To truly understand fear, you must understand helplessness.

One of the major breakthroughs in psychology in the 20th century was the discovery that most people become helpless when adversity hits.

The landmark experiment that proved the phenomenon of learned helplessness was conducted by Martin Seligman and his researchers. Seligman's team began with three separate groups of eight dogs. The first group was the control group, so nothing was done with them. The second group was put in a cage one by one, and repeatedly shocked with electricity. However, the second group's cage had an escape panel. By pressing the panel with their nose, these dogs could turn the shock off.

The third group of dogs was placed in a cage and also shocked. But, their cage did not have an escape panel. No matter what they did, the third group could not turn off the shock.

Next, the researchers put all three groups of dogs in a shuttle box, which is a box with two compartments. The first compartment's floor was lined with electric shock. The second compartment was a safe zone. The cages were separated by a very low barrier that the dogs could easily step over.

The first group of dogs, the control group (who had not been shocked at all), were placed one by one in the shuttle box and shocked. They quickly jumped the barrier into the safe zone. The second group of dogs (those who pushed a panel to escape the shock), were then placed one by one in the shuttle box. These dogs looked for the escape panel; when they couldn't find one, they jumped the barrier into the safe zone.

The third group of dogs—the dogs who could not escape the shock in the previous experiment—gave up. Six out of eight dogs made no attempt to escape into the safe zone. They had learned to be helpless.

In fact, they became so helpless that the researchers had to physically drag the dogs back and forth across the shuttle box to show them that it was possible to escape the shock. This experiment was later replicated with people using loud noises instead of electric shock.⁷

Learned helplessness is a “giving up” response

Learned helplessness is the conviction that our actions do not matter. Since we have tried and failed in the past, we believe nothing we do will make a difference. We cannot win. Learned helplessness is also known as pessimism and fear.⁵

Learned helplessness is a giving up response. It leads to passivity. You are not winning, and therefore are confused. Your confusion makes you sit back and conclude that your actions do not matter. A better conclusion is that your actions are not the right ones for this situation. Either way, failure and confusion lead to passivity.

Here are some examples of learned helplessness in action. Notice that sometimes it shows up as passiveness, and sometimes it shows up as trying to CONTROL.

Hockey

You haven't scored for three games. Instead of driving to net aggressively, you start to pass more and shoot less.

Tennis

You've lost six points in a row. Instead of setting up the next point intelligently, you play defensive tennis and lose the next rally on an ill-advised drop shot.

Figure Skating

You make a mistake early on in your routine. Instead of sticking with your game plan, you decide you need to be more aggressive, and try a triple axel—only to have it backfire on you.

Golf

Your early drives are disappointing. In an effort to kickstart your game, you become aggressive and frustrated. You wack and steer the ball with all your might, destroying your swing rhythm.

Performing Arts

You feel particularly nervous before your dance routine. You try to pump yourself up, but nothing seems to help. Instead of being playful and seductive, you rush through your routine.

Mental Toughness Action Assignment 3

Consider your own performance activity for a moment. When you are feeling learned helplessness and pessimism, how do you become passive when the performance isn't going your way?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

The Source of Unshakable Confidence in Sport

There are many sources of confidence in sport: success, previous successes, skills, fitness, etc. However, when training and competing, there is only one source of confidence *you can control*.

The source of unshakable confidence in sport is having the RIGHT FOCUS. When you have the RIGHT FOCUS in training, you make major leaps in your skill development. When you have the RIGHT FOCUS in competition, you make excellent decisions, which leads to success. Success gives you the conviction that you can cope with the challenges of competition...it also destroys any learned helplessness that you may be holding.

Just like health is a by-product, confidence is a by-product of the RIGHT FOCUS and then trusting yourself and letting your body lead.

What do I mean when I say, “The RIGHT FOCUS?”

The RIGHT FOCUS

Have you ever noticed that a coach correcting you lowers your confidence? Have you ever wondered why? I discovered the answer eight years ago teaching kids a lesson in my sport, ringette (if you aren't familiar with this sport, picture ice hockey in your mind). I was frustrated because we were trying to teach them to *speed up* when skating with the ring instead of *slowing down*.

But no matter how often we corrected them, they were still slowing down after picking up the ring. I realized that the more we corrected them, the less confident they got, and the slower they skated. I had been researching peak performance in sport, so I said, “Ok, I have an assignment for you. Just watch me skate with the ring three times. After each time, tell me exactly how fast I'm skating. If I'm skating fast, yell out the number 3. If I'm skating at medium speed, yell out the number 2. If I'm skating slowly, yell out the number 1.”⁸

After each time I skated through checkers, the players cried out their numbers in unison:

"Two!"

"Three!"

"Two! Three!" (sometimes the group disagreed)

"One!"

"Three!"

Eventually, they could all pick out exactly how fast I was skating with the ring.

Next, I had them to do the same drill, except I called out the speed I wanted them to skate at (a 1, 2, or 3). After the drill, I brought them back in. "So, what did you notice?"

"It's easy for the checkers to check you if you skate slowly!!" They cried. "Hmm...interesting observation. Let's try the drill again."

They hustled back into the drill. I called out, "One! Two! Three! One!" and they mirrored these speeds exactly. Every time they skated at a 3 (the fastest speed), they were able to hold onto the ring.

The final test: I had them do the drill one last time. Except, no one told them what to do. *They* were allowed to choose their speed. Without exception, every one of them skated at top speed (a 3) while carrying the ring.

They got it! All of them!

Only 22 minutes had passed.

I was a bit stunned. How could this be? They all got it--in less than half an hour! No coaching, no corrections, no begging, no cajoling.

What Happened?

These athletes learned a new skill in 22 minutes, all because we let them *trust themselves* to figure it out. We told them the RIGHT FOCUS was - their speed when carrying the ring -- and they did the rest. In sport, experience is the best teacher--*as long you focus on the right things during the experience.*

One time I was working with one of the best hitters on the Canadian National softball team because she had lost her confidence in hitting, but didn't know why.

We were casually watching her team scrimmage. I wanted to know what part of her batting had gone awry so I asked her to watch the pitcher carefully and tell me *exactly when the pitcher was releasing the ball* by saying the word "pitch". The first two times she said it, she was late - instead of saying "pitch" exactly when the ball was released, she said it a fraction of a second after the release. I told her this, and she quickly corrected it and said "pitch" at the right time.

We then chatted for a few minutes until I asked her to resume the exercise. Once again, she was late calling the pitch too late, but didn't realize it. I had to point it out to her. This told me what had gone wrong with her hitting - she was obviously reading the pitch too late, and therefore swinging her bat too late. Why was she doing this? ...probably because she was a little afraid of the pitch. However, by bringing her focus back to the timing of the pitch, she was able to self-correct her timing and hit with confidence again.

When you are not succeeding in an outcome like scoring goals, putting a ball, scoring a point, or winning a rally, or sweeping a stone, it's because you are not paying enough attention to a variable critical in the process—*but you don't know it*.

Usually, we lack awareness in sport performance anxiety lowers our awareness. The more nervous we are, the less we're able to take in the information we need to excel...our self-trust plummets, we try to control, we experience failure which engenders learned helplessness...and our confidence erodes.

The RIGHT FOCUS for Quality Training

You now know the difference between average training and quality training: When you have the RIGHT FOCUS, you learn and get better every time you train. That's because you are learning about your sport - the tiny nuances that no one else sees or appreciates.

“My Roots Just Kept Getting Deeper”

When you combine the RIGHT FOCUS and intense effort, you get the kind of improvement in your skills few athletes ever experience. Michael Jordan was a prime example of this. Michael studied and practiced basketball with an intensity no one else had ever brought to the game before.

My Roots Just Kept Getting Deeper

It was like a tree getting taller.
As I grew upward my roots grew deeper and formed a foundation
that kept getting stronger.
When the wind blew I was able to stay steady.
They could blow all the wind they wanted about Michael Jordan,
but they never could take on my basketball ability.⁹

I dug down deep into the layers of the game. I learned as much as I could about the game, every nuance, every variation. Some trees stop growing and they get blown over in time. I never stopped growing.

As I continued to grow there was less and less anyone could say about my skills. Over time it became easier for them to understand what I became.

Goal-Setting for Training

Goal-setting for training is the magic technique that allows you to choose the RIGHT FOCUS for training and competition so you can develop superior technique.

“I’d Never Do That Much Work.”

As a young girl, I wanted to be competent in my sport, ringette. When I was 18, I put together an elaborate binder that included:

- A 21 page essay on how I could improve my skills
- Monthly, weekly and daily fitness regimens
- Goals for shooting sessions and practices
- Mental toughness training strategies

The binder was my sports “Bible” until I reached my goal of being named captain of Team Canada ten years later. I kept my binder a secret until a talented young player asked me for help making the National Team. She studied it and finally confessed, “It looks great, but to be honest, I’d never do that much work.”

Mental Toughness Exercise 3

Write down five goals you would like to achieve this year. Then, write down the RIGHT FOCUS you will need to pay attention to in order to develop unshakable confidence. Here are some examples:

Hockey

Goal: “I want to improve the accuracy of my backhand shot.”

RIGHT FOCUS: “I want to look at the net when I’m shooting.”

Archery

Goal: “I want to improve my shooting technique.”

RIGHT FOCUS: “I want to connect to my pre-shooting mental checklist with precision.”

Golf

Goal: “I want to improve my distance putting.”

RIGHT FOCUS: “I want to read greens better - specifically, knowing if the putt is it uphill, downhill; is the line going to break left or right?”

Badminton

Goal: “I want to improve my smash.”

RIGHT FOCUS: “I want to improve my timing so I swing at the right time.”

Curling

Goal: “I want to improve my ability to draw to the button.”

RIGHT FOCUS: “I want to have supreme control over my leg drive.”

Fastball

Goal: "I want to improve my batting percentage by one."

RIGHT FOCUS: "I want to be able to say "pitch" exactly when the pitcher releases the ball."

Soccer

Goal: "I want to make more completed passes every game."

RIGHT FOCUS: "I want to know exactly how far off my passes are when they are not accurate."

Basketball

Goal: "I want to cut down on how many baskets my check gets."

RIGHT FOCUS: "I want to keep the perfect gap control so that I am in front of her the entire way."

1. Goal: _____

RIGHT Focus: _____

2. Goal: _____

RIGHT Focus: _____

3. Goal: _____

RIGHT Focus: _____

4. Goal: _____

RIGHT Focus: _____

5. Goal: _____

RIGHT Focus: _____

The RIGHT FOCUS for Competition

If you watched the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, you know that American track and field star Marion Jones was forecasted to win 5 gold medals (she won four). I watched the 200 M race, which was the first event she competed in. The media was doing its job creating drama. As the cameras zeroed in on Jones warming up, the sports announcer began talking about how the entire nation's hopes were pinned on Jones to bring home the gold. The announcer turned to colour commentary analyst Michael Johnson (former Olympic medallist in track) and said, "All eyes are focused on Marion Jones as she gets set to start her race. *What* is going through her mind right now?"

The camera panned to Michael. His face had the expression of someone who thought he had just heard the most ridiculous question of all time. Politely, he replied, “Well, I’d imagine she’s thinking about how to get a good start out of the blocks.” A world-class athlete himself, Michael knew instinctively that Marion’s best focus would NOT be on the outcome of the race.

He knew that the only way she could win would be to focus on *a goal under her control*. The 200 M is a short race. If you get a good start, you’re more likely to win than not.

Mental Toughness Action Assignment 4

Think of a recent best performance. Describe in the space below what you were paying attention to / focusing on during that performance.

Mental Toughness Action Assignment 5

Think of a recent performance that was very important to you but you did not perform well in (you basically choked). Do *not* pick a situation where you were not energized because it wasn’t important to you (e.g., your opponent was weak). Describe in the space below what you were focusing on or paying attention to during this performance.

Your Best Performance - The RIGHT FOCUS

Consider your answers. If you’re like most athletes, in your best performance *you were simply paying attention to a specific tactical element of your event that would help you achieve your outcome*. Here are some examples of the RIGHT FOCUS:

Badminton: “I was paying attention to the mistakes my opponent was making, particularly the fact that his backhand was weak.”

Golf: “I was connecting to my swing rhythm.”

Fastball: “I was watching the pitcher release the ball to predict the timing of the pitch.”

Hockey: “I was thinking about driving to the net as close as possible before shooting.”

Skiing: “I just went out had fun. I wasn’t even thinking about the race.”

Basketball: “I was trying to stay between my check and the basket at all times.”

Curling: “I was paying close attention to the ice and hog to hog times.”

Your Worst Performance: The Outcome Focus

Now, consider your answers to part two. If you’re like most athletes, in your *worst* performance you were probably thinking about the *outcome* of your performance (or worse, life outside sport!). When I say outcome, I mean things like winning, losing, scoring points, making a shot, scoring goals, making baskets, etc. Here are some examples:

Badminton: “I was thinking about trying to smash and score a point fast.”

Golf: “I was trying to two putt the hole.”

Fastball: “I was worried about getting a hit.”

Skiing: “I was worried about how big the ruts in the course were.”

Horse riding: “I was watching on the whole pattern of the routine instead of taking it one step at a time.”

Hockey: “I really wanted to score a goal.”

Basketball: “I really wanted to nail the three point shot.”

Curling: “I wanted to draw to the button.”

This is not to say that you will never think about the outcome of your event when you are performing well. This will happen sometimes. *But a consistent focus on the outcome or stressors will not tend to bring out your best.*

Mental Toughness Action Assignment 6

I want you to select three RIGHT FOCUSES for competing that are under your control for your next big event. The best way to come up with this is to ask the question, “When I’m performing well, what I am doing tactically that works?”

For example, if you are a badminton player, you might set a goal to move your opponent around by mixing up your shots. If you are a figure skater, you might set a goal to really connect with your music and the feeling of your routine. If you are a basketball player, you might set a goal to “box out” and stay between your check and your defensive hoop. If you are a curler, you might set a goal to have supreme

awareness of ice conditions and hog to hog times so you can make strategy and sweeping calls.

Remember, your RIGHT FOCUS is always under your direct and immediate control and gives your body the information it needs to succeed.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Hank Aaron

Hank Aaron, long-time holder of the Major League Baseball records for home runs, was a guy who approached hitting in a novel way. Unlike most hitters, who worried about their batting form, Aaron focused on the pitcher. His unique focus set him apart from all other hitters of his generation.

Aaron didn't stay up nights worrying about his hands or his hips. He stayed up thinking about the pitcher he was going to face the next day.

His whole pattern of thinking would be focused on that pitcher. He would say to himself, "What is good for Koosman, what works good for Koosman, and how is he going to try and get me out in different situations?"¹⁰

Why the RIGHT FOCUS Cultivates Confidence

If you've been involved in sport for any length of time, you've probably heard the idea of selecting something to focus on that is under your control and then paying close attention to it during your event. But you're probably not *committing* to it. So while athletes and coaches are familiar with this process, it's common for them to quickly discard it in an effort to control again.

If you peel back the curtain and are brutally honest with yourself, you'll see that behind every low confidence moment is fear and self-doubt. *You doubt you can cope with the challenges this competition will hand you.* What challenges, you ask? The everyday challenges that threaten your ability to win:

- Not being able to score goals because you've become predictable
- Not being able to prevent a goal or basket from being scored because you're closing the gap too quickly and getting beat
- Not being able to handle a long putt because you're not reading the green
- Not being able to make a sweeping call because you haven't properly read the ice

Usually, you have self-doubt because your awareness of a certain technical or tactical variable has been low and therefore, you're making errors.

Just as the RIGHT FOCUS improves awareness, success, and therefore confidence, lack of the RIGHT FOCUS creates under-performance, increases fear, and lowers confidence.

Years ago, in a ringette game, I was frustrated because I wasn't scoring. I was repeating positive affirmations to myself like crazy, but nothing was helping. In frustration I turned to a teammate and said, "How do you get your confidence back when you're not scoring?" She said, "I study the goalie to find out why I'm not scoring. Then I change the way I'm shooting, and I shoot more. Once I score, my confidence comes back."

Confidence is your trust in yourself to overcome these everyday challenges. The primary reason we lose confidence in our self is because, at least temporarily, you're not sure you can solve these challenges. And the reason you're not sure is because your performance anxiety is making you less aware of what's happening in your event. Your lack of the RIGHT FOCUS has created low awareness of the very things you need to concentrate on to excel.

Fear and Learned Helplessness Are Not A Problem If You Know How To Handle Them

Fear is simply a sign that your desires are in jeopardy. *Your job is not to worry about the fear, but to diagnose why your desires are in jeopardy—what RIGHT FOCUS are you missing?* Your fear is simply making a request of you to develop the RIGHT FOCUS and trust yourself to self-correct. This request might be about how you need to change your RIGHT FOCUS training to enhance your skills. Or, it might be about your opponents. The problem is that most athletes are ignorant about fear. Instead of confronting their fears head on, they tell themselves there is no problem, they're fine, and that their fears are unfounded. In sport, your mind is your basic tool for survival. Betray it by ignoring your fear, and your confidence necessarily suffers.

When you select a the RIGHT FOCUS that is under your control, the way Hank Aaron did, you're listening to your body and doing what it needs you to you in order to win—whether you need to watch your opponent carefully, execute a specific race plan or strategy, or connect to your technique in some way. You're enlisting you're the true genius of your body to help you...realizing that, on some level, your body is smarter than you and has infinite intelligence - as long as you're feeding it the proper information with the RIGHT FOCUS.

Additional Examples

Let's imagine you're a basketball player and you're worried you won't be able to hit a big 3 point shot at the end of a game.

What's a RIGHT FOCUS for this? One might be Quiet Eye - research shows that athletes who are accurate in things like shooting or putting focus on the target for a minimum of one second before they shoot. So this might be a fantastic competition focus if you're feeling nervous about hitting a shot under pressure.

Let's imagine you are golfing and you've lost connection to your swing. do not try to correct your swing, because this will cause your shoulders to tighten up and make your swing worse. Instead, you set a RIGHT FOCUS that will allow you to re-connect with your swing. Let's say you suspect your swing speed is off (In golf, if your swinging to fast or too slow, your swing will deteriorate very quickly).

A wonderful competition focus at this point would be to give your swing a number between one and ten - ten meaning your swing is very fast, 1 meaning your swing is very slow. This will connect you to your swing without you changing your technique or trying to correct your swing and control it. This is a simple focus that will allow your body to self-correct.

Here's another example. Let's say you're a hockey player and your confidence is going downhill because the other team's forwards are driving by you on the outside and beating you wide to the net. In this situation, you cannot set a goal to stop getting beat wide, because you can't control that. Instead, you set your RIGHT FOCUS to create the perfect size gap between you and their forwards - one that will allow you to stay goal side at all times. In summary:

The RIGHT FOCUS...

1. Calms your fears by re-assuring you that you will solve the challenges of this competition by raising your awareness
2. Gives your body the information it needs to self-correct errors

The reason most athletes do not use the concept of the RIGHT FOCUS is because when they notice that they are making errors or not winning, they turn their mind away from this information. They are competitive and proud people, and therefore they want to withdraw consciousness from what's happening. They become frustrated and try to CONTROL rather than open their mind to reality.

If, at any point, you need help developing some RIGHT FOCUSES for training or competition for your sport, please email us at info@lisabrown.ca.

This is the end of Lesson 1 - please check your Mental Toughness Action Assignments against Lisa's Coaching Answers next week and stay on track!

Lesson 1 Summary

1. Mental toughness is the ability to perform your best under pressure.
2. We need mental toughness because the world has become more competitive in sport.
3. Winning matters because we exist to fulfill our desires. Continued losing (not fulfilling our desires) makes us bitter, distrustful, and angry.
4. Confidence is the belief that you can cope with the challenges of competition and fulfill your desires. It is a profound belief in your athletic self.
5. Athletes do not feel confident because they decide to feel it. Confidence is not a choice. We can, however, cultivate confidence.
6. Virtually every athlete tries to gain confidence by trying to CONTROL his performance, his outcome, and his emotions.
7. The root cause of fear and underachievement in sport is learned helplessness, which is the conclusion that your actions do not matter. It is a giving up response that makes you passive or tempts you to try and CONTROL in competition.
8. The source of confidence we can control while competing is choosing the RIGHT FOCUS and then trusting our mind and body.
9. The RIGHT FOCUS allows you to pay attention to the variables your body needs to self-correct errors in your performance and win.
10. Quality training means setting training goals followed by a RIGHT FOCUS.
11. The RIGHT FOCUS in competition is under your control and lets you trust your body.
12. Since the RIGHT FOCUS corrects errors, it gives you confidence that you can cope with the challenges of competition and win. It defeats learned helplessness and gives you hope, which is the stuff of champions.

Endnotes

^{1,9}Michael Jordan and Mark Vancil, *For the Love of the Game: My Story*, Crown, 1998.

²Mark Tewksbury, *Visions of Excellence*, Viking, 1993.

³The H.H. the Dalai Lama and Howard C. Cutler, *The Art of Happiness*, Riverhead Books, 1998.

⁴Wayne Dyer and Deepak Chopra, *How to Get What You Really, Really, Really, Really Want*, 2003.

⁵Brian Tracy, *Something for Nothing*, Thomas Nelson, 2005.

⁶John Ruskan, *Emotional Clearing*, Broadway Books, 2000.

^{7,14}Martin Seligman, *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*, Free Press, 1990.

⁸Inspired by Tim Galley's *Inner Tennis: Playing the Game*. Random House, 1976.

¹⁰Tom Hanson, *The Mental Aspects of Hitting in Baseball: A Case Study of Hank Aaron*, Journal of Performance Education, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1996.