

# PLAYING IN THE BOX



## The Athlete's **Mental ToolBOX**

You can download every worksheet and exercise from the book here. It can be a great idea to review and alter these tools at the end of every season to identify the areas where you've grown and establish new training goals for your mental game. Check back here frequently as I am always adding new material!



## SELF-AWARENESS

### *Identity, Job, Approach*

Athletes who know who they are athletically (Identity), what they need to do to be successful (Job) and how they need to do it (Approach) are more confident, experience less pre-performance nerves and consistently perform at or near the peak of their abilities.

**Identity:** What skills and abilities make you the athlete that you are? It is important to know this so you will be confident in your abilities and play to your strengths. Example: I'm very fast, I see the field well, and do a good job of getting the ball to my teammates when their open.

**Job:** What are the most important things you need to do when you play to perform the way you want to and help your team? Knowing what you need to do to be successful helps confidence and keeps you focused on your process – what you need to do to play your best. Example: I need to play with high energy, be physical under the basket, and look to score when I'm open.

**Approach:** How do you need to play to be at your best? What do you look like when you're playing great. Should you be intense and locked in, or loose and playful? Should your energy be frenetic or restrained? Would you be smiling or very serious? Every athlete has their own unique approach to playing their sport and need to stay true to it to play their best. Example: I need to have fun, fly around and talk to my teammates.

For the self-aware athlete establishing the right mindset before a game is as easy as saying, "All I need to do is go out there and be me, do my job and do it my way." This can also help when your struggling; "I just need to get back to being me, doing my job and playing the way I know I need to play.

## IDENTITY, JOB, APPROACH

### Self-Awareness Worksheet

**IDENTITY:** Think about what makes you the athlete you are. What are your strongest natural abilities at this point in your career? Are you physically strong? Fast? Agile? Do you have great stamina? Intensity? What are your strongest skills? Do you shoot well? Putt well? Pass well? Do you have good vision? The ability to anticipate plays? You get the idea.

What are your top 3 strengths?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**JOB:** Think about what you need to do to play your best and help your team. You will do many things during the course of a game or match, but what is most important for you to play well? Do you have to play tough defense? Look to score? Set up your teammates? Keep in mind that Jobs are process, not outcomes (e.g., be aggressive at the plate, not get a hit).

What are the 3 most important things you need to do?

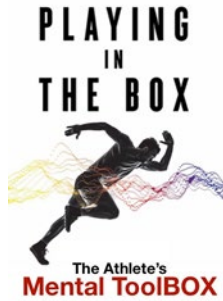
- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**APPROACH:** Think about the best game you've ever played. How were you playing? What did it look like? Were you loose and free-wheeling, or methodical and precise. Were you animated or stoic? Talking or quiet?

What do you look like when you're playing your best?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

*Be you, do your job, do it your way!*



## CONFIDENCE EQUATION

### *Think Like A Champion*

*Self-Talk* is the inner dialogue all athletes engage in. As the name implies, it's how we talk to ourselves and the *how* is critical. Why? Because our thinking, or self-talk, impacts an athlete's emotions and the execution of their skills. It's the first half of the Confidence Equation.

#### **The Doubter vs. The Believer**

Imagine that you have two athletes living in your head. Let's call one the "Doubter." The Doubter's tone of voice is negative ("Don't mess up!"). It is also anxious and focused on what it hopes won't happen ("I hope we don't lose." "I hope I don't play bad."). This self-talk creates pressure and anxiousness, and it can lead to tentative play and poor performance.

Let's call the other the "Believer." The Believer's tone of voice is positive ("I'm ready!"). It is also confident and focused on what it plans on doing ("I'm gonna play great!" "I'm gonna give everything I've got!"). It is focused on process, or "Job" ("Play with energy!" "Be aggressive!").

These two athletes – the Doubter and the Believer – feed on your thoughts. The one that take the field or steps onto the court is the one you feed the most. To think like a champion, you have to develop your self-talk. You can do this by creating self-talk scripts for key times and situations. It's too important to leave to chance.

For each of the situations below, think about how you should be talking to yourself to get ready to play your best. Write it down and use it to train your thinking. Make sure your self-talk is positive (sounds like an encouraging coach/teammate) and focused on your process (things you do to get the outcome you desire).

## Self-Talk Worksheet: Thinking Like a Champion

You can't leave your self-talk to chance. You can't just see where it takes you. It's too important to your confidence and the way you will step on to the field or court. You must train yourself to have the right thoughts at the right time.

A great way to do this is to script your ideal self-talk for key times and situations. Think about how you want to be talking to yourself in the situations below. Keep the elements of confident thinking in mind and make sure your self-talk is positive (sounds like an encouraging coach/teammate) and process focused (the things you *do* to get the outcome you want). Write down your two strongest statements.

### On your way to a game/match

- 1.
- 2.

### When you arrive

- 1.
- 2.

### Warming Up

- 1.
- 2.

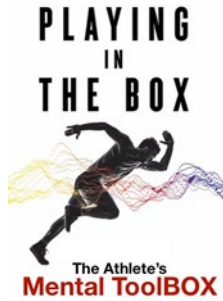
### When the game/match is starting

- 1.
- 2.

### After a setback

- 1.
- 2.

You have just identified the thinking half of your confidence equation. You know how you need to be thinking from the time you leave for a game/match until it is over. Commit these thoughts to memory and consistently use it in these situations. The "Doubter" may still try to make some noise once in a while, but in time your positive self-talk will become automatic and the "Believer" will be the only voice you hear.



## CONFIDENCE EQUATION

*Act like a Champion*

Our brains interpret and respond to what we *do*. Our body language, the way we react to adversity, and even the tempo and energy we play with all send signals to the brain that are quickly analyzed to create a response (how we feel and what we do). Some behaviors will create the response you want – sustained confidence and business as usual play. Some will create a response no one wants – diminished confidence, distracting emotions and a fading performance.

Athletes need to what behaviors help them consistently play at or near the peak of their ability. For example, a golfer walks at a brisk pace between shots and enjoys interacting with her fellow competitors. This is her confident behavior and her brain knows it. However, when she's not playing well, her pace slows and she becomes quiet. This change in behavior sends a different message to the brain and the response has a negative impact on her confidence, and play. Acting like a champion means engaging in your confident behaviors at all times, especially if you're struggling.

What are your confident behaviors? To master the behavior part of the Confidence Equation, athletes must understand the connection between their actions, responses and performance. They must know what works best for them – their own unique style. Some athletes need to be smiling and interacting with teammates. Some need to be more "locked in." Some athletes need to with a lot of energy and at a quick tempo. Some need to be more deliberate and methodical.

Knowing your style of play enables you to train yourself to be consistent with your body language, reactions to setbacks, tempo and energy will send positive signals to the brain that help you consistently play your best.

## Confident Behavior Worksheet: Acting Like a Champion

Think about one of your best performances as an athlete. Take some time to remember it clearly, and with as much detail as possible. Describe what this would have looked like to someone observing you at the times listed below.

**An hour before the game:**

**In the locker room:**

**Warming up:**

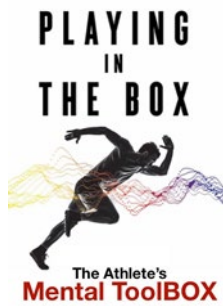
**While playing:**

**After a setback:**



You just described, in great detail, the behavior part of your Confidence Equation. This is what you look like and do when your playing your best. These behaviors trigger the confident response you want. This is how YOU act like a champion. This is what you should look like *all the time*, regardless of how things seem to be going.

**Training Note:** Helpful with the following Mental Mechanics: Confidence, Mindset, Emotions, Resilience



## SAY IT, BELIEVE IT, BE IT!

### *Performance Affirmations*

Performance Affirmations are strong, positive statements spoken out loud or in your head throughout your day that can have a powerful impact on your conscious and unconscious thinking. Affirmations can develop qualities you want to see in yourself as an athlete, as well as in your performance. The science of affirmations is pretty simple; repetition builds belief. The more you say something and hear something the more the brain believes it to be true. When these statements are positive – I will, I can, I do – the beliefs they create provides high octane fuel for your confidence.

*I am the greatest! I said that even before I knew I was. – Muhammad Ali*

Performance Affirmations are stated as truths, not wishes. They are grounded in the present, not the future. They are “I am,” not “I will be.” They are “I will,” not “I hope.” If you want to handle pressure situations better, your Performance Affirmation would be, “Pressure brings out the best in me!,” not “I will get better at handling pressure.” Performance Affirmations train your brain throughout your day and week to think like a champion. Well-established affirmations are a strong defense against the negative thinking that can chip away at confidence and deplete motivation. When it’s time to compete, your affirmations become powerful mantras that help you get in the BOX, stay in the BOX and play in the BOX.

#### Example Performance Affirmations:

I got this!	No one works harder than me!
Train, trust, play!	100 percent every time!
I set the tone!	I make plays!
I love big moments!	One point at a time!
I’m in control!	Nothing rattles me!
I belong!	Adversity makes me stronger!
I can beat anyone!	Calm, focused, ready!
I never quit!	Mentally tough, physically strong!
I trust my game!	Unshakable confidence!
I dominate games!	I can’t be stopped!
I play in the BOX!	Control your breath, control the game!



## SAY IT, BELIEVE IT, BE IT!

### Building your own Performance Affirmations

Think about a quality you want to develop or strengthen related to *yourself* as an athlete (e.g., work ethic, resilience, confidence, etc.). Select affirmations from the list of examples or create some yourself that will help you develop that quality. Write them below.

I \_\_\_\_\_

I \_\_\_\_\_

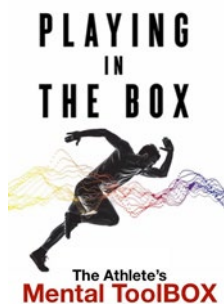
Now, think about an aspect of *your performance* that you want to develop or strengthen (e.g., handling pressure situations, trusting your game, being more aggressive, etc.). Select affirmations from the list of examples or create some yourself that will help you develop that quality. Write them below.

I \_\_\_\_\_

I \_\_\_\_\_

Commit to these affirmations to develop and strengthen the qualities you desire. Write them down and put them where you will see them on a regular basis – in your room, on the bathroom mirror, in your locker. Say them out loud or in your head, boldly and with conviction, throughout your day remembering that repetition builds belief and belief fuels confidence.

**Training Note:** Helpful with the following Mental Mechanics: Confidence, Mindset, Emotions, Resilience, Drive



## PERSONAL GAME PLAN

### *Don't Beat Yourself*

Why do coaches scout their opponents? Simple; if they know the other team's tendencies, what they do a high percentage of the time, they can create a game plan with strategic responses to those tendencies. "When they're in this formation, we will do this." "When this player is in the game this is the defense we will run."

For many athletes their thoughts and reactions to distracting events (bad plays, bad breaks or distractions), become inner opponents that make it difficult for them to play well. They may react to a bad play with a thought that undermines their confidence ("I stink!"). They may compromise their focus by dwelling on things they can't control ("This ump is awful!"). Or, they may produce excessive anxiety and pressure by thinking about outcomes ("What if I don't play well?"). It's difficult enough to play against the other team, you don't want to make it any harder.

### **Scout Yourself**

Step 1: Think about yourself as an athlete – before games and during games. What distracting events or situations tend to have a negative impact on your performance? Do you get extremely nervous before games? Do you get really upset over bad calls? Do you become tentative after mistakes? These are your inner opponents and they are detrimental to your performance. Write them in the space below and use them in Step 2.

### **My Inner Opponents**

#### **Example**

I lose confidence if I turn the ball over

---

---

---

---

# Personal Game Plan

## *Don't Beat Yourself*

### Identify Your Tendencies

Step 2: Take each invisible opponent and write down the *thoughts* that accompany it, and the *responses* those thoughts trigger. These are the tendencies that can keep you from performing at the peak of your abilities. These tendencies must be countered by your Personal Game Plan.

### My Tendencies

#### Example

Inner Opponent: Lose confidence if I turn the ball over

Thoughts: I can't handle this press. Coach is gonna pull me

Response: Play tentatively, look to get rid of the ball as soon as I get it

Inner Opponent: \_\_\_\_\_

Thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

Inner Opponent: \_\_\_\_\_

Thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

## Personal Game Plan

*Don't Beat Yourself*

### Create Your Game Plan

Step 3: You've scouted yourself and identified the tendencies that need to be addressed. You know the thoughts and responses that need a new game plan. Target each inner opponent with a simple when this happens, I will do this. "When I'm nervous before a game I will remind myself to stay in the present and focus on my controllables." "When a ref makes a bad call, I will walk away immediately, take a deep breath and tell myself to let it go." Write your game plan.

### My Personal Game Plan

#### Example

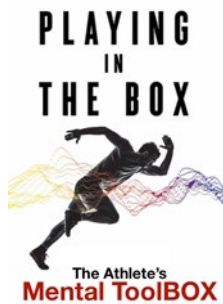
When I turn the ball over, I will say "you're good!" and sprint back to play defense

When \_\_\_\_\_, I will \_\_\_\_\_

When \_\_\_\_\_, I will \_\_\_\_\_

The successful execution of any game plan requires commitment (belief in the plan) and effort (practice). Work at your personal game plan in practice and games. It won't work over night, but with commitment and practice, you'll conquer your inner opponents and spend more time playing in the BOX.

**Training Note:** Helpful with the following Mental Mechanics: Drive, Confidence, Mindset



## PERFORMANCE BREATHING

### *The Tension Buster*

Performance breathing is the application of a centuries old breathing technique (abdominal breathing) in competitive situations to calm nerves, loosen muscles and focus attention. As a tool, performance breathing is always available and can be used before games to help athletes get into the Box, during games to work through a setback, or prior to the execution of a specific skill (like shooting a free throw or throwing a pitch).

After mastering this simple technique, you will find that even one breath can slow your heart rate, settle your thoughts and keep your skills sharp. This is a tool that can help anytime you're feeling anxious and in any type of performance situation, whether it's taking a penalty kick or calculus exam.

#### Performance Breathing Technique

1. Place one hand on your stomach and the other on your chest. Breathe in deeply through your nose as you push your stomach out. The hand on your stomach should move, the one on your chest should not (once you have the hang of this you can stop using your hands).
2. Hold the breath until you feel a comfortable tension (a.k.a., you feel like you would like exhale).
3. Exhale the breath completely through your lips.
4. As you are exhaling, mentally say a *cue word* such as "relax," or "focus," or "ready." Doing this can create super charge your process to quickly settle you down and create the mindset you need.
5. Repeat steps 1 through 4 until you feel calmer and more relaxed. Notice the effect this also has on your thinking (clearer, more focused, etc.).

Commit to practicing this simple, yet powerful, tool every day (right before bed is a perfect time). This will reinforce the connection between your breath and the response you want so that in a game situation a single breath can keep you in the Box or help you return to it.



## REFOCUSING COMMANDS

### *Get Your Head (Back) in the Game*

Every athlete needs to know how to immediately let go of a bad play, bad break or distraction. Failure to do so can pull you out of the *BOX* and negatively impact performance. A "Refocusing Command" is a short, positive and instructive word or statement used immediately after a bad play, bad break or distraction that stops negative self-talk before it can begin. They keep you in the *BOX* and focused on the next play.

#### **Refocusing Commands have 3 criteria:**

1. *Immediate* – They are used as soon as the distracting or upsetting event occurs.
2. *Intense* – They need to be strong and loud (in your head) to snap you focus back to the present.
3. *Instructive* – They need to provide clear direction for what you should do next.

#### **Examples:**

After turning the ball over, a basketball player may immediately and strongly say, "Get back!" directing them to focus on getting back and playing strong defense. A figure skater after a fall may say, "Finish Strong!" to direct their focus to the remaining elements of their routine.

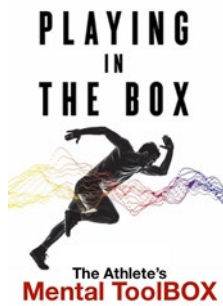
#### **Application:**

What are the negative events common to your sport? What happens that can throw you off your game? Create Refocusing Commands for these situations, making sure they meet all 3 criteria. Use them in practice and games. Before you know it, they will become automatic responses that keep you in the *BOX* when something bad happens.

#### **My Refocusing Commands:**

---

---



## RESILIENCE TECHNIQUE

### *Get Your Head (Back) in the Game*

#### *The Five R's*

Refocusing after a bad play or tough break is an essential skill for all athletes because *all athletes* make bad plays and experience tough breaks. Having a *process* (something you can do) for handling these situations is an important tool to recover mentally when faced with adversity. The Five R's is an excellent technique to empty the box and get back on track.

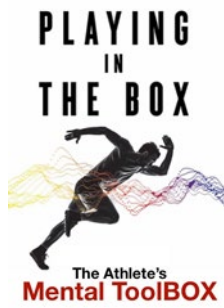
**Release:** Get rid of the negative energy: Being upset is to be expected. Do something to get the anger/frustration out. Remember that it is important to remain in control. You don't want your opponent thinking you're losing it. Pulling hard on a chinstrap, adjusting gloves, or throwing some grass in the air are some examples of "releases" used by athletes. Once you've released this energy, it's time to...

**Regroup:** Compose yourself: After letting that intense feeling out it is important to get yourself back together quickly, because the only play you can make is the *next play*. Take a deep breath, direct yourself to let go of the emotion ("Relax. You're good!") and...

**Review:** This is a critical step! The brain only wants to understand so it can make adjustments. It does not want to judge what just happened! Think about the event in an objective, analytical (non-emotional) manner. Figure out what happened (e.g., "I got out of position."). Tell yourself what you need to do differently next time (what you need to do to "fix it"), trust that you will make the adjustment, and...

**Relax:** Reconnect to the moment and surroundings. Take another deep breath. Remind yourself that you love this game and perform best when you're calm and enjoying yourself. The mistake is now history and you've learned from it. The only play to make is the one that's in the Box now, so it's time to...

**Refocus:** Step in to the uncluttered box, focus on what you need to do, and make *this play!*



## DRIVE – Getting Where You Want to Go

### Goal Setting

***Outcome Goal:*** What do you want?

***Focus Goals:*** What do you need to do/work on?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

***Process Goals:*** How will you do it?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

***Progress Goals:*** How will you know you're making progress and staying on track?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



## DRIVE – Getting Where You Want to Go

### Goal Setting

#### Example

**Outcome Goal:** I will make the varsity basketball team and become a starter as a junior.

#### Focus Goals:

1. Improve my overall strength.
2. Improve my shooting skills.
3. Improve my dribbling skills

#### Process Goals:

Improve strength:

1. Workout (home or gym) 5 days a week.
2. Follow a nutritional program for adding healthy weight.

Improve shooting skills:

1. Practice shooting a minimum of 5 hours a week.
2. Make 100 free throws every shooting session.

Improve dribbling skills:

1. Practice dribbling a minimum of 5 hours a week.
2. Create a list of dribbling drills and exercises to use.

#### Progress Goals:

Improve strength:

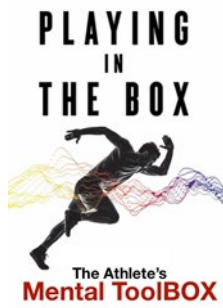
1. Gain 10 pound by August 1st.
2. Increase bench press and squat by 20% by August 1st.

Improve shooting skills:

1. Make 70% of my free throws by August 1st.
2. Track my shooting workouts on my training calendar.

Improve dribbling skills:

1. Improve my “cone drill” time by 5 seconds by August 1st.
2. Track my dribbling workouts on my training calendar.



**DRIVE – Getting Where You Want to Go**  
*Motivation Worksheet*

**Outcome Goal** – Write what you want:

**Meaning** – Write why this is important to you:

**Intrinsic Motivator** – Describe how you will feel when you accomplish your goal:

**Extrinsic Motivator** – Describe what will happen when you accomplish your goal:

**Lighting the fire** – How will you get motivated yourself to pursue your goal?

**Stoking the fire** – How will you stay motivated when it gets tough/discouraging?

## DRIVE – Getting Where You Want to Go

### *Motivation Worksheet*

#### Example

**What do you want** (Outcome Goal):

I want to earn a D-I scholarship to play softball in college.

**Why is this important to you** (Meaningful)?

I have wanted to play in college since I was 12. I want to become one of the best players my school has ever had and live my dream.

**Describe how you will feel when you accomplish your goal** (Intrinsic Motivators):

I will feel very proud because I worked hard and did everything I could to become the best. I will be really excited about the opportunities I'll have.

**Describe what will happen when you accomplish your goal** (Extrinsic Motivators):

I will be a D-I athlete! I will be one of the top players in the country. I will be playing on a larger stage – more attention, better facilities, and opportunities to travel with my teammates.

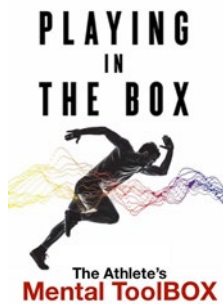
**How will you get motivated yourself to pursue your goal** (Lighting the fire)?

Before every workout/practice I will:

1. Listen to one of my fire up playlists
2. Picture myself playing for the University of Georgia.
3. Set my focus and attitude to have a great workout/practice.

**How will you stay motivated when it gets tough/discouraging** (Stoking the fire)?

1. Remind myself why it's important to me, what it will feel like and what will happen when I accomplish my goal.
2. Talk to my trainer who can always make me feel better and keep me on track.
3. Watch some of my favorite motivational videos about grit and determination.



## INTENTIONAL PRACTICE

### *Getting to Your Next Level*

If you want to be good you need to practice. If you want to be great you need to practice a lot. If you want to stand out from other great athletes you have to practice differently. Showing up and doing what the coach tells you won't give you an edge, nor will it maximize your true potential. If you want to take your game to the next level, you've got to take your practice to the next level. This is done by being *intentional* in your efforts. An athlete practicing intentionally is *purposeful, focused and deliberate*.

**Purpose:** When someone believes the work they do is meaningful to them they invest in it more. They are willing to make sacrifices and work harder. Connecting your practice to something important to you like getting more playing time or making the varsity team will help you dig deeper and get more out of it. Athletes practicing at the next level know what they're working for.

**Focus:** Some athletes are referred to as "gamers." Unfortunately, this may seem to suggest they can go through the motions in practice and just flip the switch when it's time to play. Trust me, no one shines in games unless they are focused in practice. Lacking focus in practice can lead to going through the motions and mental mistakes, neither of which make someone a "gamer" in the true sense of the word. If you want to play in the BOX, you have to practice in the BOX. Athletes practicing at the next level commit themselves before every practice to be locked in and reset their focus before every drill.

**Deliberate:** Vince Lombardi once said, "Practice does not make perfect. Perfect practice makes perfect." When you are working on your skills, routines or plays strive for perfect mechanics and precise execution. Muscle memory makes it possible for an athlete to practice without being completely locked in which can result in practicing sloppy mechanics. Athletes practicing at the next level emphasize great execution when no one is watching so they can benefit from it when everyone is watching.

Preparing to have a next level practice takes less than 30 seconds. Before joining your teammates create an intentional mindset by answering three questions:

**Why does this matter? What am I going to work on? How will I practice today?**



## **MENTAL IMAGERY**

### **The Gym That Never Closes**

Mental Imagery (visualization) is a powerful tool available to athletes anytime, anywhere. This technique can be used to practice specific skills or routines. It can also be used to visualize a major achievement or goal.

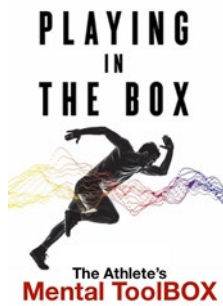
The key to productive mental imagery is to use the proper perspective and to involve as many of your senses as possible. The correct perspective is an inside-out view. Let's say you want to work on hitting out of a sand trap. With an inside-out perspective, you would see the ball in the sand and the green in front of you as opposed to view yourself from the gallery.

Involving multiple senses is critical because this is how you convince your brain that the skill you're imagining is actually happening. Think about suspenseful movies. Multiple senses are stimulated at the theater, which makes your brain experience the movie as real. This is why you feel excited or frightened. If you can create a similarly vivid "movie" of the skill you want to work on, your brain will enter that reality and respond as it would if you were physically practicing. This is a great way to get extra, perfect, reps!

**Training Note:** helps with these Mental Mechanics: Confidence, Mindset, Emotion, Resilience, Drive

## Example Mental Imagery (Golf)

1. Chose a time when you won't be interrupted and free your mind of all distractions. Use some *performance breathing* (exercise #) to relax. Commit yourself to this session of mental practice.
2. Close your eyes and begin your session by seeing yourself standing confidently on the golf course. Look around and notice all the familiar sights. Hear the sounds. Feel the grass.
3. When you feel ready, draw your focus and attention to the specific skill you will be working on. For example, hitting out of sand traps more successfully.
4. Begin by feeling your shoes settle into the sand. Feel yourself find the exact balance you want. See the ball with your marking in the sand. Tell yourself that you will knock it close to the pin. Notice your wedge resting just above the sand, settling into the exact place you want it to. Keep your eye on the ball as you draw your club back. Feel the club begin to descend effortlessly. See and feel it make perfect contact with the sand and ball, sending both toward your target. Watch your shot as it lands exactly where you want it to and rolls gently to within a foot of the cup. Feel the confidence and pleasure that comes from hitting such a great shot.
5. Repeat step number 4 many times, making sure to execute the skill perfectly, just the way you want to, every time.
6. Open your eyes and feel the confidence and satisfaction that comes from a great practice session because that is what you just had!



## PERFORMANCE PLAYLISTS

### *Music and Mindset*

Picture Michael Phelps sitting pool side an hour before his race. Or Serena Williams warming up before her match. How about Tom Brady throwing passes before gearing up. Or Lebron James walking from the team bus to the locker room. Despite the fact that these champion athletes play different sports, they would all be wearing a common piece of equipment. Headphones.

Studies have shown that listening to music has a variety of benefits for athletes, including; regulating emotions, increasing energy, improving focus, and speeding recovery. Music stimulates multiple areas of the brain making it a powerful part of your *mental pre-game warmup*. Carefully selected music can help you consistently get in the BOX.

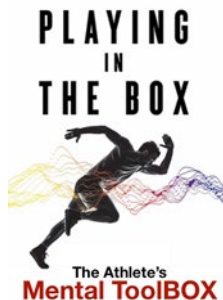
### **Performance Playlists**

Music can move you. Emotionally and toward the BOX. It can energize when you're flat, relax you when you're tense, or keep you right where you are when your mindset is good. Create three playlists that will help you get in the BOX – one to get going, one to settle yourself and one that works when you're already there.

#### **Energizing Playlist**

#### **Calming Playlist**

#### **Good-To-Go Playlist**



## **Mental and Emotional Stamina** *Maintenance for the Third Gear*

You have two jobs (at least). You're a student-athlete. Each role requires time, energy and discipline. Taking care of yourself is the key to being ready to meet the challenges that come your way, on and off the field/court/course. As an athlete, you understand the importance of getting good sleep and eating well, but this neglects the Third Gear. If you want to be a *Complete Athlete*, you have to care for a complete athlete – *mind* and body. This requires knowing how to attend to your emotional and psychological well-being. The 5 tips below can help you stay emotionally strong and mentally sharp all-season long.

1. ***Know how to turn down the volume:*** It's important to know how to settle yourself down when the pressure is on, or when things get stressful (in sports and life in general). Learn how to use your breathing to calm yourself in tense moments. Become familiar with some basic meditation or mindfulness techniques for stressful times (there are some excellent apps for smartphones).
2. ***Strive for excellence, NEVER perfection.*** Your goal should be to work hard and get better. Understand that perfect is the enemy of great. Don't get frustrated when results from your efforts aren't immediate. Don't dwell on disappointment, learn from it. And, don't compare yourself to others. Your growth as an athlete is all that matters, and all you can control.
3. ***Identify a team of supports, and use them:*** Who can you talk to about sport-related frustrations? Who can you talk to about school concerns? Friend issues? When your sad? Have answers to these questions and get comfortable utilizing these valuable resources.
4. ***Create some balance in your life:*** Maintain some relationships that extend beyond your teammates. Cultivate your non-sport interests and talents. If you enjoy more than one sport, don't feel pressured to specialize or play year-round.
5. ***Know the symptoms of burnout:*** If identified early, burnout is easy to treat – take a break, step back, talk to someone. If ignored, it can create a love-hate relationship between athletes and their sport, or worse, chase them out of it. Symptoms of sports burnout include: decreased pleasure from participation, vague injuries or frequent illness, excess tension, increased emotional and physical fatigue, irritability and sleep difficulties.





## PLAY GROUNDED

### *What's Your Sports Credo?*

How do you think about your sport? How do you think about yourself as a player of that sport? Do you have a set of beliefs and principles that help guide your actions, and reactions, when you train and play? In other words, do you have a *Sports Credo*?

Being grounded in a realistic and positive philosophy can help you before, during and after competing. It can keep you from slipping into the unrealistic expectations and harsh judgements that have a negative impact on performance and steal the joy from the game that you love. Anchoring yourself to a *Sports Credo* that respects both the game and yourself will help you play grounded.

A good way to develop your *Sports Credo* is to become very clear about how you think about your sport, and how you want to play it. Finish the statements below and use them to help you identify the beliefs and principles that will help guide you throughout your athletic journey.

#### **Grounding Statements:**

1. I love my sport because . . .
2. Things that make my sport challenging (and sometimes frustrating) are . . .
3. The way I want to handle these challenges is . . .
4. I play my best when . . .
5. I show respect for the game and myself by . . .
6. After a game I want to be able to say . . .

**Example Sport Credo:**

*I love my sport because it's exciting, challenging and fun. I pursue excellence in my sport, not perfection. I know that I play my best when I trust my game, play with passion and look like I'm having fun. I also know that thinking too much and judging myself never helps and takes the fun out of the game. I believe that I will have a great game every game and accept the reality that **NO** athlete plays great every time. I view challenges and setbacks as opportunities to get better and grow as an athlete. When the game is over, I want to be able to say I gave 100%, played my game, and had a blast.*

**Example Sport Credo:**



**Training Note:** Helpful with the following Mental Mechanics: Confidence, Mindset, Resilience, Drive