

The Talented Athlete



PREFACE

REACH FOR YOUR FULL POTENTIAL IN SPORTS AND LIFE

You have a calling to reach for your full potential. You have talents and gifts that are meant to help you achieve important aspirations, overcome obstacles, and fulfill your purpose.

As an athlete, sports gives you the unique opportunity to develop your mental and physical talents to reach your full potential, help teammates, and be a successful competitor. Your involvement in sports teaches you lessons that can guide you throughout life.

While it's natural for athletes to focus primarily on developing physical skills only, you need to understand that your mind and body are not two separate parts that operate independently. They are linked and jointly impact your performance on the playing field and in life. The more you train and condition your mental skills in unison with your body, the more you become a well-rounded athlete and person.

This workbook is designed to help you learn about the mental-side of being an athlete, and how your mind and body can successfully work together. It also gives you tools to develop your mental performance. Several of the mental skills explained in this workbook are based on the work of the legendary sports psychologist Robert Nideffer, Ph.D who has helped make the mysteries of the mind understandable and manageable for athletes throughout the world.

Please take the time to read each section and do the exercises throughout the workbook. The more you work on your mental game, the more you strengthen the mental muscles needed to develop into a well-rounded athlete, competitor, and person.

If you have not taken the Athlete's Mental Edge™ online assessment of your mental performance style as an athlete, please contact A Talented Mind at 804-272-3927 or email contactus@atalentedmind.com. This assessment and its interactive, online 32-page report has helped Olympic, professional and amateur athletes improve their mental performance on the playing field and in other parts of their lives. You can also benefit from having the same unique view of your mental style and how it can help you achieve your aspirations.

Please visit our website at www.atalentedmind.com to learn more about how to fully develop your natural talents as an athlete and a person.

IMPORTANCE OF MANAGING YOUR MENTAL PERFORMANCE

ELEMENTS OF PERFORMANCE

As an athlete, your performance in practice and competition depends on three key elements:

- Your *physical ability* to play the game
- Your *knowledge* about your sport (the fundamentals and rules)
- Your *mental skills* such as your ability to set goals, collaborate with others, and stay focused under pressure

If you are like most athletes, you consciously develop the physical part of your sport and its strategies and rules. You train your body to perform the physical moves to be successful in games and learn how to execute game strategies and plays. But, like most athletes, you probably do not focus on training your mind to help you be successful in practice and critical game situations. Most athletes leave the mental side of their performance to chance, but it is often the dividing line between success and failure. There are two situations in which this is most important as explained below: *when you are competing at elite levels of your sport, and when you are in high pressure situations.*

COMPETING AGAINST EQUALLY MATCHED OR SUPERIOR COMPETITION

When you compete against opponents with lesser talent, you can usually dominate them through your superior athletic abilities. Your mental performance has less of an influence over you winning or losing.

When you compete at elite levels, the difference in athletes' physical and technical abilities is very small, about 3%-5%. This means that elite athletes basically have the same physical abilities. The difference between winning and losing at elite levels hinges more on how your mind performs.

When athletes are asked why they win against elite opponents who have equal or superior athletic abilities, they do not mention physical skills or knowledge of their sport. They say, "*We win because we are more motivated to do whatever it takes to outplay those teams.*" In other words, when faced with elite competitors who have equal physical abilities, the athletes who can control their minds under pressure, limit distractions, and mentally motivate themselves typically win.

COMPETING IN HIGH STRESS SITUATIONS

When you compete in high pressure situations (*such as final moments of a close game or in a championship match*), the pressure you place on yourself can cause mental errors. For instance, in stressful situations, you may start putting too much pressure on yourself or your teammates to be perfect which can result in you becoming overly tense and making errors. Or, you may become upset at your teammates and overly criticize them instead of being supportive and motivating.

In short, high stress can cause your mind and body to make errors at critical moments. How you control your thinking during these situations can significantly help you defeat opponents who are experiencing the same high pressure and may not have good control over their minds.

STARTING THE JOURNEY

Your journey to develop strong mental abilities for practice and competition starts with putting your sports experience into a bigger perspective. The first chapter of this workbook enables you to explore the important lessons you are learning as an athlete that can help you throughout your life. By first exploring the life lessons you learn from your sport, you better understand how your mental and physical experiences as an athlete can last a lifetime.