

MARCH MADNESS

Ever had one of those times where you are just **'that close'** to getting on a roll, or scoring well. You are coming up with kind of a **Heinz 57** series of games, a bit of this and a bit of that, sprinkled by a few more missed spares than usual. Well... you are most certainly not alone, and yes like everything else there is a reason for it. We could blame tiredness, fatigue, a long day at work. But...lets go with the scenario that you had prepped well for the event, were well rested and essentially ready to do your best. So what happened?

CONSIDER THE MENTAL PERSPECTIVE

You get on a small roll (a couple of strikes) or possibly enter the 10th with strikes in frames 8 and 9. And...then....as easily as you got on this mini roll, you fall off. Consider this...many times we let being determined, grinding it out, being driven, intense, etc pry us away from simply trusting our shot. We want to put just that extra little something on the shot because we want this strike so bad we can taste it; when really all we need to do is simply **let go** and **trust it**. As Nike says: **'Just Do It'**.

How do you get to trust when you are all wrapped up in determination, grinding it out etc? You decelerate your mind. To decelerate your mind essentially you want to slow down the pace of which you are seeing the event unfold. For example; when we are struggling and begin to project that the end is near, we sometimes begin to do the math in terms of what is needed to get where we want to be. IF this is in a qualifying round it may be that with 5 games to go you figure you are 200 out and must have a big game, or maybe several above average games. Along with this we press and create an unrealistic, not necessarily accurate timeline. (ie) I **must** get this start **now** because time is running out. On a game by game basis this can be likened to being 50 down with 5 frames to go, or feeling because you are 30 down after 3 frames you **must push harder**, essentially you are feeling the clock run out – when in fact you still have 'X' games or frames.

To begin the deceleration:

1. Gain a new perspective – time is on my side – one ball at a time
2. Ignore the score, ignore the opposition – keep your head down. This will allow you to circumvent some of the typical distractions that enter the mind when you are watching other stuff (opposition, score).
3. Do an inventory check – what is the one thing I can do well – and focus on doing that one thing. This is meant to unclutter your mind.
4. Find a quiet place and Breathe – yes breathe deeply, slowly, evenly. Deep breaths put more oxygen into your blood stream and thus give yourself more energy to play, and...at the same time relax yourself. That quiet place may be a small cove between the concourse area, a corner of the bowling center. – Or...simply go for a walk – slowly purposefully with your head down – breathing.

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Monitor Self talk

Self talk refers to all those moments when you literally talk to yourself. Oft times it goes unnoticed. And...sometimes athletes get the mistaken notion that challenging themselves to do better is always good. While it is good to challenge oneself, how and what we say to ourselves is vital. In the scenario listed above the word 'now' and the phrase 'push harder' can be part of the core problem. These words evoke ultimatums and as frequently are inaccurate. Consistently playing better when faced with ultimatums is much more difficult because it gets our emotions tilted towards that pressing 'have to' mentality. It would be better to phrase what you want in an objective manner, without the same potency. For example one self talk option may be "*I am 200 down, I am pressing, I feel tight, lets just cool the jets, relax, refocus on the process. **What can I do to help give myself the best opportunity to be successful**?" I'll refocus my energies on the things I can control. Patience, take my time, lift, rotate, hold my follow through,*

The conversation I have just had with myself gives me the opportunity to bring my mind back to focusing on what I can control. AND I also do so without judgment. We could spend more time on Self talk but...I want to leave it for another time. Now let's look at what we can do prior to the event to help set up productive responses to the competitive environment. IF...you are interested in pursuing this and would like to adopt me as your mental training coach drop me a note and we can keep in touch.

The Pre-tournament preparation – To Prepare or Not To Prepare

It is important to remember that the more you invest in the work to win something, the more it hurts when failure comes your way. Conversely IF one does not put in the preparation failure becomes a distinct probability.

IF...the challenge or expectation you have placed on yourself is incongruent with the work ethic you provided in preparing for the event – you set yourself up for failure more than success. I can retell many a story of this. Most characteristically the bowlers that decide to enter something and then proceed to come in and practice one or two weeks before the event, but nothing before. Often times these same bowlers may possibly start out well, due to a false sense of confidence – BUT – ONCE REALITY SETS IN either by way of inconsistency or increasing pressure on themselves to perform they regress to old unproductive habits and lose their initial confidence.

I am sure you agree it is important to prepare your mind for the various hurdles that you may encounter, and as importantly identify the game plan you will employ to conquer '**said**' hurdle. One of the things all players need to do is recognize and accept the difference between having **the will to win**, and believing "**I will win**". The two are much different. The first

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recognizes supports and reinforces your desire, drive and determination to do the stuff in preparation and in tournament that will give you the best opportunity – to win. The other **“I will win”**, is full of ultimatums and nudges you in the direction of paying more attention to all those factors outside of your control.

What may seem on the surface an ironic perspective, I have found it to be invaluable in all my wins to have accepted that I may not win what I am setting out to do AND...with it the deepest feelings loss evokes. The acceptance of the possibility of loss has given me two edges in my preparation. One, the skill set to recognize when I begin to develop the tightness and overzealous interest to control everything. Two the commitment and self discipline to do everything I can to be ready.

Your Practice

Make your preparation more about process than score, and continue this frame of mind throughout practice, league, and tournament play. Typically a split of 60% process and 40% result makes sense. This means that some practices may never even involve score. It may mean that you dedicate more time working on spare conversions, taking your time, your pre-shot routine, or... simply working on 'holding your follow through'. By the way...if there is one physical skill that will make the biggest difference it is 'HOLD YOUR FOLLOW THROUGH' 😊

When you do decide to enter into a scoring/results type of practice do so fully committed. See it as a test, or an experiment, or like doing a systems check. AND...when you do begin the scoring or matches against an opposing player don't try out something NEW...keep to what you have been working on in practice. This is what you are testing out. It makes absolutely no sense to throw in a new line, or new grip, etc into a competitive scenario unless you have practiced this in the practice setting first. WHY? Because if it is successful we tend to hang our hat on it and think hey...this is the magic elixir I have been looking for, when in fact it really was just a temporary relief that has no significant data to lead you to trust it in the 'real thing'.

This might be a good time to mention that in your practice pride yourself in being willing to experiment. Test out new ideas, see how it works, how comfortable you are with “X” change. If it is not working you can always go back to what was there before.

And...finally...consult. Find someone you can work with. – a coach. Two heads are better than one. Be open to their ideas but know that you always have the power and right to make the choice of what you test, adopt, trash, or believe. And...drop me a note via Email IF you'd like to connect online for coaching.