



Welcome to The Performance Psychology Lab at Proball Optimal Performance Training Program

Mental Game Instructors:

Ben Strack, Ph.D.

James Boykin , M.S.

Most elite athletes would agree that a large portion of their success is accounted for by mastering the psychology of performance. However, the mental game is often misunderstood. Many baseball players look at the mental game with the intention of reaching the, somewhat elusive, “zone.” Interestingly, the “zone” is achievable only a small percentage of the time (possibly 10-15%). This means that the majority of the time, performance is imperfect. So, what are you doing about the other 85 to 90% of the time when adversity is present and things aren’t going perfectly? This is when mental acuity, endurance, toughness and resilience can separate you from the rest of your competition. The following tips and training tools are essential components to building a high achieving mindset.

ProBall has assembled a team of trained professionals with masters and doctorate degrees that can provide you with the mental game “tools” that can help you reach your full potential. Once these tools are learned they will hold tremendous value, not only in baseball but, in every area of your life.

Here are some “mental game” errors that we commonly observe and help our players recognize and resolve through our detailed and systematic training approach....some are obvious and others are not so obvious:

Over-focusing:

The Athlete’s performance struggles are often related, not to a lack of focus, but to focusing too hard or over-focusing. Example: hitters who are down in the count will often shift into a mental mode of intently over-focusing on putting the ball in play. This is a very defensive approach to hitting which can cause you to tighten up and become hesitant. Having a good two-strike approach is important but many hitters do not realize their approach is counter-productive. Becoming a complete player means that you have studied and discovered what works best for you in different situations with various levels of criticality and importance. This discovery process is the essence of perfecting your mental game.

Over-eagerness:

Baseball is a game of patience; many players make the mistake of “forcing” their performance. Learning the art of “trying easier” will allow you to relax under pressure and perform with poise and control.

“Deer-in-the-Headlights”:

“Freezing up” or lacking aggressiveness often occurs with poor preparation, or difficulty managing in-the-moment performance pressure. On the other hand, an athlete could be well prepared but he does not trust his ability, which could lead to similar negative results. Developing greater self-awareness will help you avoid many of the common pitfalls that may hinder your readiness to perform.



Great in Practice, Lousy in Games:

Difficulty transferring good outcomes from practice to games is a common result of being emotionally under or over-reactive, especially when in the “lime-light”. By learning to manage adversity and distractions during competition you will see Improvements in your ability to adjust and get into the “groove” quicker.

Intention Vs. Attention:

Mechanical breakdowns can occur when a player’s “intention” is not in line with the task at hand. For example, when a pitcher’s intention is to throw the ball hard, he will often over-throw the baseball. As a result, the mechanics of his motion change and negatively impact the outcome (wild pitch, poor control of pitches). Learning how to develop accurate and appropriate “intentions” will likely lead to improved “attention” and, therefore, improved performance.

“Mental chatter” or “Stinkin’ thinkin”:

Thinking too much, worrying and over analysis can impede the flow of your game. Competitive athletes are often their worst enemy. To avoid self-defeating thoughts, it is necessary to build a performance vocabulary that is positive, powerful and confidence-building. Get to know your “inner critic”. Every athlete carries on a silent dialogue during and even after performances. Those athletes who are aware of their self-talk and are able to re-channel negative thinking into positive thinking tend to be more consistent and less vulnerable to “slumps”.

Our Training Program:

The mental game training program at ProBall incorporates 6 factors of peak performance to help you elevate your game. We use state of the art computer technology to enhance sport performance and to help prevent many of the mental errors that can, ultimately, hamper your progress. This technology includes Heart Rate Variability, Biofeedback (BFB) and EEG (concentration) Neurofeedback. Biofeedback technology is currently being used nationally and internationally to train elite athletes in all major sports. Your performance psychology training package will include the use of this amazing technology along with the following techniques:

1) Goal Setting

Success and failure is largely dependent on the athlete’s perception. Although baseball is a game of statistics at higher levels, the failure rate compared to other sports necessitates a closer look at how success and failure is defined. If batting average and slugging percentage are the only ways that a hitter evaluates success on the field – he will likely be disappointed much of the time. Therefore, developing a good “plan” for game time is obviously important. Goal setting is a critical skill for improving performance, achieving a greater sense of competence and getting the most out of your playing experience. With a set of realistic but challenging goals, a player can minimize distraction while maximizing motivation, enjoyment and results.

2) Biofeedback (BFB)

What is Biofeedback?

Certain physiological patterns may lead to superior performance. Biofeedback is a Computer training device that allows you to view your body’s physiological patterns in real time (i.e. heart rate, muscle tightness, breath-



ing patterns and brain activity). Athletes are taught to control their physiology after information from their biological systems is “fed back” to them via a computer monitor. This information is then used by the athlete to increase emotional control and optimize performance.

The Idea Behind the Method:

The more often you practice acquiring a particular mental state, the clearer the neurological pathway becomes, and the easier it is to get back to that mental state on your own. Biofeedback teaches you to gain control of desirable mental states. Once you have gained control of yourself you can gain control of your performance. While athletes devote many hours to physical preparation, sound mental preparation is quite necessary to achieve optimal performance. Athletes can experience substantial improvement in their focus, confidence, energy management, and resilience through dedicated mental skills training.

3) Relaxation/Energizing

When it comes to performance, the importance of relaxation speaks for itself. The problem is that many athletes know that relaxing during critical moments is meaningful but they do not have the proper tools to do so. Learn how to channel short tempers into high energy. With proper guidance, you can gain greater self-awareness to expedite your discovery of the correct “recipe” for balancing your emotions and maximizing your performance achievements.

4) Imagery

The best athletes are able to create a “mental movie” of how they would like to perform before they actually perform. With effective imagery, an athlete can visualize his performance using all 5 senses (taste, touch, smell, hearing and seeing) with vividness and control. Fine-tuned imagery and visualization can provide the blueprint for precise execution. If the blueprint for success is already in place before competition, when critical moments arise, it will feel like you’ve already been there.

5) Self-Confidence

It is no surprise that thriving athletes have high levels of performance confidence. Of course, it is easy to feel confident when things are going your way; the challenge is to maintain a high level of confidence when you are struggling with your performances. Learn how to bounce back quickly from errors/mistakes and develop mental “toughness” with unique confidence building exercises. Many athletes become confident only after they succeed. However, experiencing success is only one ingredient for building confidence – confidence is not just the result of something “good” happening, it is a talent that is created or learned. You may gain a great deal of confidence over the years from repeatedly succeeding, but the true test is how well you manage your negative voices and perceived failures as they, inevitably, begin to surface. In order for confidence to be consistent, you must learn to handle the “ebb and flow” of the game behind the game – the game of confidence.



6) Concentration

Learning how to rapidly shift your focus from broad to narrow, internal to external, while under pressure, is a critical concentration strategy necessary for handling demanding performance situations. Good performance is often made or broken based on split-second decisions. Concentration breakdowns lead, not only, to decrements in performance but can also leave the athlete with greater susceptibility to injury.

Many athletes falsely believe that good concentration requires increased effort. When in reality, the harder you “try” to concentrate, the more thoughts enter your mind. Good concentration often requires the cleverness of trying “easier”. “Letting go” of your mechanics and trusting your swing or your pitching delivery are key components of “shifting” or “centering” your concentration. Once these skills are developed properly, distracting thoughts will only minimally impede the flow of your game, therefore, allowing you to perform on “automatic pilot”.

**“...no matter what level you’re on, to have the type of career you can be proud of, you have to take charge of your mental game. It’s what can set you apart from other players”
- Hank Aaron**

All-time major-league leader in extra-base hits, total base hits, total bases, runs batted in
second all-time in home runs.

For further questions regarding our performance psychology training program contact:

Dr. Ben Strack (949) 722-7805