



Winning the Athletic Mental Game Book Excerpt 3

From Chapter 33: Dr. Ken Ravizza: Mastering Performance Cycles to Maintain Absolute Concentration

You often hear about players being fine in non-pressure situations, but tightening up and "choking" when stakes get higher. How can athletes prevent this from happening?

The issue becomes, 'where does the breakdown in performance occur?' Is the person failing to recognize it? Do they recognize and then not release. Do they regroup? How is their body language? Are they refocused? Are they thinking clearly and are they committed to what they are going to do? Are they trusting themselves and just doing it?

The key is to find where the mental breakdown occurs. This is where the coach has to find out what's going on. That's the coach's role or the sports psychologist role.

Can the player go through the 4 R's? Can they keep them in the right sequence? The routine functions to give athletes something to do consciously. If we're going through the light signals, all the negative stuff has a much lesser chance of entering the mind and interfering with performance.

I want the routine to be conscious. I do not want the routine to be automatic. Once a routine is automatic, it's a habit pattern. The routine is something athletes go to get themselves where they need to be mentally.

If the lights are green, I'm just going, it's pretty much just automatic. So if the signal is green, go forward, it's no big deal. If it's yellow, I've got to do other things.

A lot of athletes say that to me, well I do this or that and it's automatic. Well if it's automatic, then by definition you can do it without thinking about it. This means then you can do it without beating yourself up.

Performance routines or cycles can't come from a coach by telling the athlete what he or she needs to do. It needs to be their thing.

Let's look at the open sports (those with constant movement and limited breaks in the action). In field or ice hockey, basketball, soccer or lacrosse you have players running up and down a court or field. They are not going to have time to go through a full performance cycle, but the same procedure still takes place, just at a much quicker pace. What is your advice for these athletes?

Soccer players have told me: 'I'm used to working with baseball players, but 'our world is a very quick world.' What they are really saying is this: 'I can do it (the performance cycle), but it's going to be a much faster process.'

Let's take a look at ice hockey, which has shifts. Players come out, then they recognize where they are. They may be ticked off a little because of what just happened on the ice.

This is the point where they can release it, pound the stick or whatever. Then, regroup by the way you start sitting. Get your shoulders up, sternum up, you start getting into the flow of the game. Now you are ready for the next shift.

Also, take the classic example in basketball. How many times do you see someone come down on a fast break, blow the lay-up, then reach in and foul the guy? It's so common because the guy's out of control and he's pissed off.

If the player is mentally tough what should happen after he or she blows the lay up is that they have to hustle back on defense.

As the player runs back, this is the time to bad mouth yourself, say a negative comment, make a fist, and then release it. Once you turn around, you're now on defense. There's that old concept of turning around, both physically and in your mind.

As the athlete sprints back, the ball's down court in the far corner. I back off my man, I'm communicating with my guys, the ball starts moving around as it gets closer to my area, I get pulled towards the ball. So the ball is dictating where I'm at mentally.

(Note: You just read one-fourth of the full interview found in Winning the Athletic Mental Game.)