

# Helping Coaches Build Champion Programs Since 1996 CHAMPIONSHIP PERFORMANCE

Coaches Corner

## Liskevych Reflects on 40 Years of Coaching

*This month we interviewed Terry Liskevych, owner of the Art of Coaching Volleyball. He was the former US National Women's Volleyball Coach and headed up programs at Ohio State, the University of Pacific and Oregon State. He is former Pac 12 Coach of the Year and led 7 teams to the Final 4.*

CP: As coach of the US Women's national volleyball team, you had to bring together a group of all-stars to perform as a unit fairly quickly. What were some team building exercises or group dynamic programs that helped in this regard?

TL: Role definition. You had a group of players where almost all of them were leaders. Deciding how to blend 18 All-Americans was a challenge. We had a performance enhancement team that would tailor programs to identify each player's personality. What was this person all about? What was unique about them? The goal was to get players to open up so we could know as much as possible about them. What makes them tick? In addition, we built a core of common values.

CP: Describe an exercise to get players to open up about themselves.

TL: We had a very structured team exercise monitored by our perfor-

mance enhancement team where each player and staff member publicly talked about their strengths and weaknesses. The purpose of the exercise was to show how all of our strengths can overcome any of our weaknesses.

CP: Did you ever do any specific pre-season activities with your Olympic teams or Pacific or Oregon State?

TL: We would take them out to a high ropes course. This helped us start the season with a spirit of cooperation.

CP: You have a speech on the "Bakers Dozen" of motivational success secrets. Can you describe the three best that can make the most impact on athletes?

1) **Setting goals** – for example in college I wanted my players to set goals in three areas: A. Athletic/Volleyball goal. B. Academic/School goal and C. Life goal.

2) **Managing time** – working on managing time and being organized is an underrated life skill and athletic skill. Dependability and reliability are key ingredients to success.

3) **Not being afraid to fail** – failure is not the opposite of success. Many athletes need to be taught and reminded of this. You've got to learn from mistakes and learn how to pick yourself up after failing.

CP: Do you treat rivalry games, such as the big one with Oregon any differently from a typical regular season game? Do you have to get your team to calm down a little bit because of the intensity of the rivalry?

TL: They will be 'up' naturally for any big game. The crowd will be

more into it. There feels like there is more at stake. However in pre-game preparation and in game management, we didn't treat rivalries much differently than we did any other game. You have to take things one point at a time. Never focus on outcome or build up or down an opponent. Respect all – fear none.

CP: What are your thoughts on emotion management in general?

TL: People are all different and they have to play to their personality. When a player is performing best, what does that look like? What is their body language? The coach and athlete have to work together to determine what amount of emotional energy they need to excel.

In volleyball, it's important to stay on an even keel between points. But some players actually play better when they are a little anxious and on edge. Others don't want to whoop it up after any good play. Each player has to know where their zone is and what that looks like and then try to replicate that as best as they can each game.

CP: Do you prepare the team any differently during the play-offs as opposed to the regular season? Do you keep pushing the team hard or back off a little bit?

TL: When it gets close to play-off time, I like to cut down on practice. If we were doing two hours, I would cut it to one. The team has to be mentally and physically rested come play-off time. The most important aspect of peaking is rest.

See Liskevych, page 7...

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# No "Space Out" Exercise Helps Concentration

The one quality that all successful athletes have is the ability to concentrate: to focus their attention on what's important and totally block out any or all distractions that might interfere with performance. When the chips are down, when the pressure is turned up high, these athletes consistently maintain an unbroken and intense focus on the task at hand. Many athletes believe concentration is a God-given talent distributed at birth to the chosen few. This belief is non-sense.

Like any other athletic skill, it can be mastered and fine-tuned. Concentration involves turning attention totally and fully to what you are doing. If an athlete is thinking about a previous error or worrying about what will

happen next, they are not concentrating. Choking and other performance problems are usually a consequence of breaks in concentration when athletes leave the present focus and either step back into the past or forward into the future.

The skill of concentration needs to be flexible enough so the athlete can shift quickly in a number of directions.

For example, a quarterback scanning the field for incoming rushers and open receivers must have a broad focus of attention which quickly must be narrowed when he spots the open receiver.

The long distance runner will periodically shift concentration from a narrow internal monitoring of bodily functions to a narrow external focus on the terrain or nearby challenger. It is important to keep in mind that the shifting of concentration is done very quickly, often without conscious thought.

**Recommendation:** *Note: The remainder of this article is addressed directly to athletes.*

Concentration is almost entirely dependent on athletes maintaining their composure. If they are panicked, over-whelmed with pressure or "freaked out" by the competition, forget about concentrating. The kind of stress sends the mind racing and fills the head so full of self-doubt and self-criticism that concentration involves learning how to stay loose under competitive stress.

The next step involves developing an awareness of when you "space out" or get distracted. Athletes must learn how to catch themselves before they fall into lapses of concentration.

One way to do this is for your athletes to practice the following exercise:

During a typical practice session, whenever you feel your concentration slipping, immediately stop what you are doing. Then gently bring yourself back to the present and focus intently on what you were trying to accomplish for 10 seconds. While this may sound silly, the goal of this exercise is to train athletes to recognize breaks in concentration and to focus attention at will.

Here is another exercise: Sit up close to your TV screen with the set on but no volume. Hold your thumb out against the screen and focus only on your thumb for 10 seconds.

When you can do this without being distracted by the pictures, increase your time to 20 or 30 seconds. When you can go a full minute without being distracted, turn the volume up on the TV and try to focus only on your thumb for 10 seconds. Gradually increase your time without being distracted.

Another exercise to try is practicing free throws or other drills with loud distractions, music, or even have another person deliberately try to distract you.

P.S. One thing to remember here: concentration is a "let it happen" skill, not a "make it happen one". You can't force yourself to concentrate.

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## Best Injury Communication Strategies

In the book “*Friday Night Lights*” by H.G. Bissinger, the author tells the story of Booby Miles, the team’s star running back. After suffering a serious injury he is virtually forgotten by coaches and teammates on the bench which contributes to his sense of isolation.

As a coach, how you respond to your athlete’s injury plays a role in how quickly they can get back in the action.

**Recommendation:** Here are 7 steps to take to help your athletes after the suffer an injury: 1) *Be Empathetic.* Let your athletes know that you understand what they are feeling and having to go through. Depending on the seriousness of the injury, don’t expect them to ‘suck it up’ or ‘shake it off.’ Understand that they will need some time to adjust to their situation, which can include anger, frustration, and disappointment.

2) *Work with your athlete’s self-esteem.* Understand that they have just suffered a major blow to their feelings of self-worth. Let them know in both actions and words that you value them as a person, not just as an athlete.

3) *Give them a role on the team.* Help them fight their feelings of worthlessness by giving them another role on the team. Assign them jobs like special assistant coach or consultant to a specific area of practice.

4) *Do not allow the athlete to isolate themselves from the rest of the team.* Related to the point above, insist that the athlete continue to function as an important part of team. Assign other teammates to monitor the injured athlete’s involvement in film study or other areas. Ask the teammate to intervene whenever the injured athlete begins to isolate him or her self.

5) *Let the athlete know you are there for him or her.* Increase contact and communication with the athlete. Call them when they don’t make it to practice. Visit them in the hospital or while they are in re-hab.

6) *Expect them to do a modified version of training.* Maybe they can work out different body part besides the ones that are injured. If they are more severely injured, ask them to practice mentally by visualizing what they will do in their next race, meet, match, or game.

7) *Watch out for signs of depression.* If it looks as though the athlete is getting depressed, refer him or her to a professional counselor. Signs of depression include loss of interest in school or other activities, changes in sleeping or diet, or in extreme cases, having suicidal thoughts.

**Conclusion:** Athlete injury, whether temporary or permanent, will be a disruptive force in the athlete’s life. As a coach, try to be more encouraging while the athlete is in the rehabilitation stage.

Once they come back, they will probably be a little ‘gun shy’ and pre-occupied with getting re-injured.

Make sure they focus their thoughts on what they want to see happen, not what replaying circumstances that led up to the injury over and over again in their minds.

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## Winning Ways

### ■ Liskevych on Recruiting

CP: What are the most important elements of successful recruiting? When recruiting, do you screen athletes for both personality and mental attitude?

TL: I liked to recruit multiple sport athletes and see how they competed in another sport. They wouldn’t know I was there and I could watch how they handled adversity, how they reacted to the crowd. I could see how they interacted with teammates and coaches.

At USAV/AAU junior club events and high school home events, there was a chance the athlete would be on their very best behavior knowing they were being watched.

So yes, we always tried to look at mental attitude of recruits.

### ■ Art of Coaching

CP: What is the Art of Coaching Volleyball all about and what are your future plans with other similar web sites?

TL: We started the Art of Coaching Volleyball to improve the coaching quality of everyone involved with the sport. Our website is a virtual online coaching clinic that produces – “exceptional fresh coaching content every single day.”

There are systematic teaching tools from hundreds of coaches showing many different way to teach skills and coach.

Last January, we started our second sport – the Art of Coaching Softball and more sports, as well as a general coaching site, will follow in the future. Our goal is to positively impact youth sports by presenting expert content at clinics and online, focused on improving the quality and skill of coaches, athletes and parents.

## Garcia's New Confidence Leads to Master Win

As Sergio Garcia prepared for yet another attempt to win his first major championship, his soon to be wife Angela Akin handed him a stack of letters. Each one was a hand written note on green paper (symbolizing the green jacket for Master's winners). The letters came from friends and family members from Texas all the way to Spain, his home country. The addressed two key points: why they loved him and why they thought they knew he could win.

The injection of positivity added to what Garcia had already been working on to boost within himself: a self-belief that wouldn't waiver, combined with an inner calm that he could endure through his worst shots.

Historically, when Garcia had hit a bad shot at a crucial time, he began to sulk. So he told himself that was not an option for the Masters. In the bathroom of the home they rented for the week of the Masters, Akins covered the mirror with green sticky notes each featuring a motivational quotes from Buddha to Teddy Roosevelt. The most special was from Akin herself: "Don't forget to be awesome," it read.

When Garcia made a huge mistake on hole 13, he could have crumbled. But not this time. He recovered from a poor tee shot to save a par.

How many times have you been play-

ing a solid round only to mess up one hole and start to think, "Oh crap, I just screwed up my entire round."

To fix this situation, focus on what is in front of you now – one shot at a time. Stick to your pre-shot routine. Turn, "Oh no," into, "What now?"

So adversity has hit... so what? Feeling bad about those rough times will not help you rebound successfully.

Instead of lamenting over the past, ask yourself, "What can I do now that will get me back on track and improve my golf game?"

To get a complete mental game golf plan to conquer your internal critic, visit [www.goodtogreatgolf.com](http://www.goodtogreatgolf.com)

### Motivation

## Story on Perspective to Motivate

As coaches, we're constantly looking for motivational stories, poems, or quotes we can share with our team to illustrate a point we're trying to make. These serve as reminders of what it takes to be successful.

This story about a group of individuals building a cathedral can be altered very easily to fit into your program. I would recommend using the story to demonstrate the importance of attitude and having the outlook necessary to do the difficult things it takes to be successful. Right before practice begins would be the ideal time to tell this story.

A human resources executive would help in the field to determine how laborers felt about their work. She went to the building site at (insert your school here).

She approached the 1st worker asked, "What are you doing?"

"Are you blind?", the worker snapped back. "I am cutting these boulders

with old tools and putting them together the way my boss tells me to. I'm sweating under the blazing sun, it's backbreaking work, and it's boring me to death!"

The human-resources executive quickly backed off and retreated to a 2nd worker. She asked a single question: "What are we doing?" The worker replied: "I am shaping these boulders in to usable forms, which are then assembled according to the architect's plans. It helps to feed my family. It's a job. It could be worse."

Somewhat encouraged, she went to a 3rd worker. "What are you doing?" she asked.

"Why can't you see?" beamed the worker, as he lifted his arms to the sky. "I'm on a cathedral building team."

**Recommendation:** After you tell this story to your players, ask the following questions.

1) If the attitude you take to the practice field with you today is a decision you make, what kind of attitude will you have?

2) Which worker do you feel your attitude most closely resembles on a daily basis and what can you do to make it more like the third workers attitude today?

3) As a part of this team, are we willing to put forth your best?

Remember this quote: "I am responsible for my attitude, thoughts and actions. Nothing and no one can take away that responsibility and the control which I have as an athlete and member of this team."

Brian Cain, Peak Performance Coach  
[www.briancain.com](http://www.briancain.com)

## Liskevych on 4 Mental Game Keys

CP: When you consulted with a sport psychologist or mental game coach, what techniques did they use that were most beneficial?

1) Focus/Re-Focus – Each point is all about self-control. We would teach players what to say to themselves during practice. For some players, we would have them put a plastic tab in their shoelaces with the words, “Next play” to give them a visual reminder of where they need to be mentally.

CP: Are there any practical tips you used to help athletes quickly regain focus?

TL: You must deliberately train in a practice setting to let go of what just happened in the previous play (both positive and negative outcome). Focus on following the ball, expect to be

involved in every play and play as if every ball is going to come to you.

2) Relaxation - They have to learn how to relax. Relaxation is a skill best practiced and learned off the court. They have to be able to re-focus and regain their composure quickly.

3) Visualization was important in two different ways. First, they needed to see themselves performing during a game and executing skills to the best of their ability. Second, they needed to see the realization of big picture goals. *Examples:* Seeing a banner unfurled that said Final 4 or Pac-12 Conference champions. For the Olympic athletes, they needed to see themselves on the podium getting a medal.

4) Confidence – In women’s sports especially, confidence is a huge factor. Players need to ask themselves questions like, “What makes a confident athlete?”

Is it remembering your best previous performances? Is it receiving praise from teammates or coaches? What does the body language of a confident athlete look like?

Once they have their skills down pat, can they execute them at a critical time? They need to practice seeing themselves in a pressure situation making plays. Also, they can ask themselves, what do I need to work on today to get better? Keep it simple – one or two areas specifically. All this together builds a more confident player.

## How My Teammates Can Motivate Me Exercise

*Here is a team building exercise that can be done any time but is especially effective during preseason.*

*Goal:* Allow athletes and please to tell their teammates the most effective ways to motivate them when they’re struggling.

*Numbers:* No limit. Consider dividing team into smaller sub units if you have a large team. It is especially effective to divide the team into sub-units based on positions or type of competitive event.

*Space:* Any space where athletes will not be disturbed.

*Game plan:* Begin this activity by explaining that all athletes are motivated in different ways. For example, some athletes

respond better when teammates “get in their faces” and verbally challenged them, while others respond better when a teammate encourages them.

As a team, it is very important that each athlete is aware of what his teammates need from him or her when they’re struggling with their confidence or at times when they’re not putting forth maximum effort.

Tell athletes to take a minute or two to reflect upon what their teammates can do to help out in these types of situations. Then have each athlete verbalize this information to their teammates.

The reality is that athletes don’t always say the right things. But after participat-

ing in this exercise, they will have a better understanding of what to say and how to encourage their teammates.

*Wrap up.* Here are some questions to ask after completing this exercise:

- 1) Did you learn anything **new** about any of your teammates?
- 2) Why is it important to know **what motivates** your teammates?
- 3) What will you do to remember what you learned about your teammates?

Excerpted from the book **101 Team Building Activities** by Greg Dale, Ph.D. and Scott Co-nant. [www.excellenceinperformance.com](http://www.excellenceinperformance.com)

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When all is said and done, more is done than said.

”

Terry Liskevych, NCAA/Olympic Volleyball Coach

## 'Next Play' Tactic Helps Players Refocus

*Note: the following is addressed directly to athletes.*

One of the hardest things for any athlete is to move forward after a mistake and focus “in the moment.”

Yet athletes are constantly told by coaches to forget about the last play, the previous point or the mistake that happened. Think about a time when, in the heat of battle, you made a critical mistake.

For example, the gymnast that falls off the balance beam, the goal keeper that froze and let in a cheap goal, the tennis player that slammed the ball long when he had his opponent leaning the opposite way.

You probably felt a rush of negative emotions (frustration, anger, embarrassment) flow through your body and mind.

You look at your coach and he tells you, “*Forget about that mistake.*”

It is not like you think, “*Hey that’s great advice, I feel better now.*”

In fact, you probably grab onto the most profound word in that sentence, MISTAKE, and replay it in your mind until you are totally taken out of your game. You know performing in the moment is necessary, but it seems impossible to focus to do after you make a stupid mistake or error on a routine play. Why is it so difficult to let go of performance errors?

When you make a mistake, it’s normal to be upset. If you’re never upset after a mistake, either you don’t care or you expect to always under-perform. The second explanation is that you were not taught how to let go of mistakes, have not practiced the skill of focusing in the moment, or have not learned how to refocus after a mistake.

Duke’s Coach K understands the value of teaching the ability to focus, in addition to learning the “X’s” and “O’s” of the game.

According to Coach K: “To waste time lamenting a mistake or celebrating success is distracting and can leave you and your team unprepared for what you are about to face. It robs you of the ability to do your best at that moment and to give your full concentration.”

He teaches something he calls the “next play” philosophy and there is no denying that this philosophy has helped his teams win five national championships, appear in 12 Final Fours.

This “next play” philosophy or mindset was ingrained in him when he was an undergraduate at the U.S. Military Academy: “It’s more like a West Point thing, like what’s your next mission? So, whenever you got knocked back individually and collectively [as a team], they taught you, ‘OK, next play. What am I going to do next?’”

No matter what your sport, you can this successful philosophy and, with some practice, you can learn to quickly re-focus after a mistake.

**Recommendation:** Here is a tip for adopting the “next play” philosophy.

Process the mistakes and start asking yourself, “What’s next?” This prompt helps you focus on what you have to do next. This gets your head out of the last play and puts your focus in the present moment.

If you consistently ask yourself this question, you will develop the habit of focusing on the present moment.

Athletes that judge themselves during their performance can apply the same strategy. Instead of thinking about how well you performed the last play or skill, tell yourself “NEXT.”

Patrick Cohn, Ph.D.  
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### ■ Peak Performance Bullets

#### ■ Stir Up Some Passion

Your team is in a rut and can’t seem to break out of the funk. Here’s 3 tips to roust the team out of their comfort level and shake things up a bit.

1) *Set a stretch goal.* Pick a short range audacious goal that seems so far out there that it might not be achieved. Even if the goal can’t be met, you will force the team to re-think how they are currently doing things. They will devise new ways of attacking problems or at least come up a few new approaches that can be incorporated the next season. This is one instance when failure to meet the goal can still help the team in the long run.

2) *Ask tough questions.* They can sow the seeds of new ways to get things done in a more efficient fashion. Example: “Our special teams has had many break downs this year. Which one of you guys is not going all out to do your job the right way?”

3) *Point out examples of top performance.* Tell team members about the best practices that their competition is doing. They’ll begin to see the gap (if it exists) between what they do and what the absolute best are doing to achieve success. Use that knowledge as a challenge to improve your team’s performance.

#### ■ How to Deliver Bad News

It’s the mid-point in the season and things aren’t going the way you or the team expected. It’s time to address the bad news at the next team meeting. There may well be some wounds that are opened but it you don’t get deeper into why things aren’t going well, you’ll never improve.

*Suggestion:* Have a ‘fix the problem’ brainstorming session to turn things around. After all the bad news is aired and suggestions given to remedy the situation, always end on a positive note by acknowledging something the team has been doing well.

Liskevych Interview, cont.

CP: Is there any benefit to a pep talk speech before a game? If yes, what key points are stressed that have made the most impact in the past?

TL: In most instances, I would say no. You will often hear coaches telling players, "This is the most important game of your life" or "We have to win tonight." These kind of statements cause undue added pressure. I like to keep it on a basic level and focus on the two or three things the team needed to do well to perform at our peak to win in that upcoming game. I also think it was more the job of the team captains to get a pulse of the team and help them get where they needed to be emotionally (either pumped up or calmed down).

CP: For the greatest teams you have ever coached, what factors helped to unite the team to achieve their goals?

TL: Bill Walsh once told me – "A team will become great when the team leaders wrest control of the locker room away from the coaches." The leaders and captains have to set a tone that the rest of the team will follow.

Jane Ward – one of the greatest players in US Olympic volleyball history was coaching at San Jose State early in my career at Pacific told me – "Keep saying what you are saying. Eventually a light bulb will go on for one-third of the team. They will start doing exactly what you want. They will have your back and be committed to your philosophy."

I liked to break down teams in three categories. You have your top third who will be your leaders and role models and carry the team. Spend the most time with these athletes.

The next third will listen to your leaders and make up the core of your team. They will be good role players.

The bottom third will simply be hard to reach. You spend the least amount of time with this group.

With my top players, some would

practice on their own time to put in extra reps. I would tell them, "Hey, go find another teammate to go along with you."

CP: If you have a team where underclassmen are the best players and want to take leadership roles early on, how does that impact the role of senior leaders?

TL: I wouldn't stifle their desire to become leaders early on. I would group them with some of the older leaders so they can learn and be groomed for an earlier leadership role the next season. You never want to discourage them.

You may have to explain to the upperclassmen that some of the younger players will make us all better.

Sometimes, you will have a situation where the best players don't have any desire to be leaders. In those cases, you have more one to one meetings where team roles are addressed. We want everyone to be working toward a common purpose to the best of their ability.

CP: What the keys to having good communication with your athletes?

TL: We would have five to six meetings a year with all staff present. There would be an agenda and notes taken by a staff member of topics discussed to give a written copy to the athlete later.

Some of the questions we would ask are: "Where do you want to improve the most?"; "What do think of your role?"; "How can you improve in your role?".

I liked to do a two-minute check in with players before practice to see how their week is going off the court. In college, with the 20-hour per week practice/meeting/conditioning cap, I wanted my staff to stay on top of what the individual player moods were. We were always trying to find out what made each player tick to improve motivation and help them fit into a role better.

For substitutes, we would lay out what the keys to becoming a starter would be. These need to be measured in practice. We would tell them to be so good in practice we had to give them more playing time. To do that, they had to win nearly every drill they are involved with.

CP: Describe your approach to team discipline and standards.

TL: I was most concerned with lack of effort and bad attitudes in practice. A couple of players like that can bring the team down. We would have the entire team do some type of physical punishment (run lines, push-ups/sit-ups, etc.) if even one player was demonstrating a bad attitude.

We had a minimum set of standards we wanted all the players to abide by. The first step to address any problem player issues was to remove them from the drill until they changed their attitude. They would then get a warning and finally possibly a suspension. In extreme cases, they were asked to leave the program.

I was not one to scream at the players. I would let them know that they controlled their attitude and effort and it was up to them to attain success.

Of course, sitting their butt on the bench was a great way to reinforce the concept that poor attitude and effort wouldn't be tolerated.

A guiding principle that I have always used with my staff and teams is embodied in one of my own quotes – "when all is said and done, more is done than said."

John Sikes, Editor  
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## MMA Fighters Approach to Mental Toughness

Favorites, even heavy ones, don't always win. So how does the upset happen? What allows one person or team to come through against a physically better opponent on a given day?

"The best fighter never wins, it's always the guy who fights the best," says Advisory Board member Brian Cain.

According to Cain, the greatest factor in who fights the best may not reside in one's brawn, but rather their mind, especially come game day.

Former MMA Middleweight champion Rich Franklin agrees: "Training for a fight is about 90% physical and 10% mental, yet when you enter the octagon it becomes about 90% mental and 10% physical because all of the physical preparation is done."

"There are so many things that can distract you," Cain reinforces. And the knowledge of that plus the desire to fight as well as they've trained when that big day comes is why competitors seek a mental edge.

"The mind controls the body," Cain says. "If these guys are in control of themselves mentally, now they can go out there and

perform carefree, to the best of their ability. I help them focus on the things they can control, not the things they can't."

*What Do Professionals Do To Help MMA Fighters Gain Mental Toughness?* Almost everyone involved in MMA believes that the stronger a fighter is mentally, the better off they are. Which leads to the next question: What is it that professionals do to help a fighter's mental game? Stephen Ladd, a mental game coach works on getting rid of the negativity that holds athletes back via some traditional sports psychology, hypnosis, energy medicine, and meditation.

"Their (fighters) conscious and subconscious minds aren't in complete agreement," Ladd notes. "The fighter wants to be the best more than anything in the world, but at the subconscious level, he is filled with doubt or fear, or any number of negative emotions. This sets up a self-sabotage scenario. By getting the subconscious and conscious minds on same team – your team, the whole fight game becomes a lot easier."

Cain also works to get rid of the negativity that fighters sometimes carry with them, even having Georges St. Pierre throw a

brick in the water with Matt Serra's name on it before his successful rematch in order to signify that he had gotten rid of that past event.

In fact, that's a big piece of the whole puzzle. In order to lose the negative thoughts that impede performance, one must get rid of everything but the now.

"The past is history, the past does not dictate the future, the future is a mystery, once you start thinking about what's going to happen in the future that's when you're going to get caught," Cain says. **Great athletes are 'not focused on what ifs, they're focused on what is.'**"

Ladd uses the term 'eliminating the interference' to describe one of the things he does as mental game coach.

Even though they may go about handling the mental game 'with different weapons,' Cain and Ladd still generally target the same things that traditional sports psychologists do. "We teach fighters how to eliminate their negative beliefs (the interference) and 'get out of their own way'", Ladd says.

Robert Rousseau [www.thoughtco.com](http://www.thoughtco.com)

## Liskevych on Drills that Build Mental/Physical Toughness

CP: Your colleague Penn State volleyball coach Russ Rose designed drills that would challenge his players mentally and physically. Could you give one or two specific examples?

TL: We would set aside a time in practice till we got a drill done to perfection. Maybe we would set aside a whole practice for a drill that is mentally and physically exhausting.

We had one called the "Drill of 15" where you divide your team equally ½ & ½ on each side of the net. They had to make 3 touches (dig-set-hit) 15 times for a total 45 contacts in a row

without an error (ball hitting the floor, ball out, net touch, double contact, etc.) or we went back to zero and started over again.

Another would where we called out a situation and they had to execute perfectly for two points.

*Example:* "It's 13 all in Game 5. You have to make perfect passes for the drill to end or we start over."

Our goal was to have the athletes 100 percent all in for every drill. We wanted to push them out of their comfort zone.

The practice environment ultimately shapes behavior. We wanted to structure our practices to push athletes to the max.

We would do a mental toughness defensive drill where we would hit a ball hard and the player would have to extend to their maximal range to get there for the dig.

The best drills were both mentally and physically taxing.

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