

Keys to great mental preparation for competition



Preamble

The following psychological resource for participants and athletes, has been developed by sport psychologist Fiona McCarthy on behalf of the NSW Office of Sport, as a key initiative of the NSW Government's Future Champions strategy.

For more information on Future Champions, please visit www.sport.nsw.gov.au/pathways-and-development

Getting to know the author

Fiona McCarthy is a registered psychologist, specialising in sport psychology and is a member of the Australian Psychological Society and the Australian College of Sport and Exercise Psychologists. Fiona owns and operates Mind and Body Balance, a business she established 25 years ago.

Fiona is the Hunter Academy of Sport, Sport Psychology Consultant and a New South Wales Institute of Sport, Sport Psychology Service Provider. Over the last twenty-

five years, Fiona has assisted many teams, athletes, parents and coaches in the areas of confidence, concentration, handling pressure, motivation, goal setting, time management, performance preparation and general well-being. Fiona has worked with numerous sports, assisting recreational level athletes to professional, international, Olympic and Paralympic level athletes, reach their full potential.



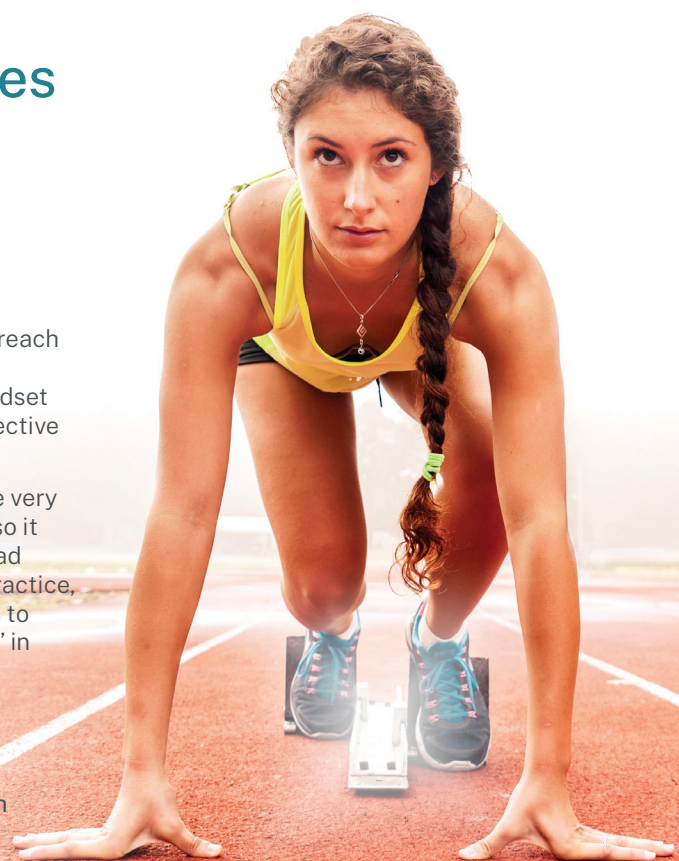
Background to these resources

The importance of having a mental 'tool kit' to support your learning, performance and engagement on and off the sporting field.

The following resources have been developed by Fiona McCarthy to assist athletes at all levels, in understanding the importance of having a suite of mental 'tools' at their disposal. These 'tools' are practical and multidimensional and will help athletes learn and develop the necessary mental skills they require to help them navigate their way through their sporting journey with a positive mindset and achieve success on and off the field.

It is well recognised that to reach the pinnacle within sport, an athlete needs a superior mindset consisting of strong and effective mental skills and strategies.

Importantly, mental skills are very intertwined and integrated, so it is recommended that you read about and put into regular practice, a number of these resources to strengthen the 'mental tools' in your kit bag!



Keys to great mental preparation for competition

Preparing well for a competition is paramount for succeeding in competition.

Being well prepared encompasses a lot of aspects such as your nutrition, sleep and physical and mental preparation.

Good preparation is continual from one competition to another and one training session to another.

Outlined below are some tips to help you with your mental preparation for competitions.

1. Make sure leading up to a competition you are eating and hydrating well and getting good quality sleep (i.e. at least 7-8 hours a night).

Also make sure all of your equipment is ready - that's your responsibility and not anyone else's. Don't wait until the morning of the competition to pack your bag. Being prepared can reduce your nerves and stress levels.

If you have trouble sleeping, try to develop a routine before going to bed. For example, take a shower, read your favourite book, or listen to music with the lights out.

Some tips to help you get to sleep are:

- **Focusing on your breathing.**

Make sure you're taking slow, rhythmical abdominal breaths. Or you can follow a pattern of

breathing of 'in' for 4 seconds, 'hold' for 7 seconds and 'out' for 8 seconds. Repeat this for several cycles.

Focus your mind and body on your breathing to block out any other distractions like other thoughts or surrounding noises.

- **Do a relaxation scan of your body.**

A body scan involves imagining a 'relaxation bar' scanning your body (normally from head to toe) for any tension. When it 'detects' tension or you feel that body part is holding tension, imagine the tension or tightness dissolving away.

- **Off load your excess thoughts or worries.**

Write them on a piece of paper or in a diary. This can ease the 'traffic' of thoughts that may be circulating in your mind and create calmness and clarity in your thinking.

- Don't focus on your event as you are trying to get to sleep as this may create a sense of increased nerves or excitement which are not desirable states to be in prior to wanting a restful sleep.



2. Try not to get to the venue too early. Once at the venue, make sure you check in and then try to relax.

Talk to family and friends, cheer on teammates, read a book or listen to music.

You may also wish to do some mental imagery or rehearsal relating to the processes required for you to perform well in your upcoming event.

All these strategies can help distract your thoughts about other competitors, your event and thinking too much about your upcoming performance.

3. Have a good warm up. Focus on you, NOT others. Get yourself ready!

Music can help with this, so too can your positive self-talk.

Try to not think too much, especially about possible 'what ifs'.

Pick two key positive action words that represent how you want to perform for example, 'smooth' and 'flow' or 'fast' and 'strong'. These words are a reminder of what you need to focus on and what you can control. Think about writing them on your hand

or on your sporting equipment just before you are about to compete (i.e. in the warm-up or within the marshalling area) say the words to yourself and then DO WHAT YOUR WORDS SAY.



4. And finally, but most importantly, believe in yourself. Enjoy yourself. Enjoy the experience and learn from it. Challenge yourself and SMILE!

We hope you liked our tips

Have FUN building your psychological skills and strategies and put them into practice in and out of sport!

Remember importantly, if you are unsure of any of these tips or require further advice, please talk to your Coach, Parent or consult a Sport Psychologist.

You might like to check out our NEW animated YouTube video, Developing your mental 'tool kit' to support you in and out of sport featured within the NSW Office of Sport's Pathways and Development webpages @ <https://www.sport.nsw.gov.au/pathways-and-development>.

Check out more tips for Participants @ <https://www.sport.nsw.gov.au/pathways-and-development/social-and-recreational-sport-participants>

And our tips for Emerging and High-Performance Athletes @ <https://www.sport.nsw.gov.au/pathways-and-development/emerging-athletes>



**Future Champions -
Developing your
mental 'tool kit' to
support you in and out
of sport.**

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