

It's all about effective routines!



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!



It's all about having effective routines

Thorough preparation is the key to success, confidence and having fun.

Preparation is continual and involves constant learning. Being organised is an important skill to have when preparing to compete. Training is where habits are developed and honed.

Part of being prepared is establishing **positive routines** or **patterns of behaviour** and **habits**.

Routines commonly used by athletes include : pre-event (i.e, the night before), warm-up, warm-down and evaluation routines.

Routines can assist in good preparation, reduced anxiety, and improved concentration and confidence levels.

Players/athletes should develop routines in many areas. Three key areas may include the following:

- **Warm-up routine** - which involves physical and mental skills.
- **Re-grouping or re-setting routine** - used within the sports arena when a mistake is made, or when you need to reset your focus.
- **Warm-down routine** - which involves physical and mental skills, especially around evaluation of your performance.

Suggestions for your warm-up routine.

We all know that a 'traditional' warm-up routine comprises of physical activities like running, stretching exercises and some sport-specific drills. This warm-up

is done to get your body ready, but what is done to help you switch your on your mind?

One suggestion could be to listen to some music that could motivate

you or calm you down if you are nervous. You could also talk with people who make you happy, helping you to momentarily, reduce your focus on your upcoming event/competition.



Suggestions for your re-grouping or re-setting routine.

We all make mistakes! The key, however, is to view the mistake as a lesson and to learn from it. This is why having a re-setting or re-grouping routine is of great value.

In these routines, players/athletes develop skills to overcome mistakes, block out external noises or pressure and re-focus on the task at hand (e.g. recovering from a first bad touch or tackle or a missed pass in football).

One practical way you can do this is to maintain **positive self-talk**. Self-talk involves using positive action words that are simple and specific to the task at hand, and help you focus on the process rather than the outcome.

For example, for a soccer player who has missed a tackle, words like 'ball' and 'dominate' can help them to redirect their focus onto the ball. After all, wherever the ball is, will determine where the player should be.

The word 'dominate' could also remind a player to have urgency and be strong in their tackles and passes.

These positive action words help remind the player to deal with the mistake, learn from it and get their head and body back into the game.

Done often and well, using positive self-talk can support confident play and positive performances.

Suggestions for your warm-down routine.

Warming down is an important part of a player's recovery following a training session or game and supports readiness for their next one (i.e. 'closing one chapter' and preparing for the next).

A warm-down routine typically involves some jogging, exercises, refuelling with food and being adequately hydrated, getting a

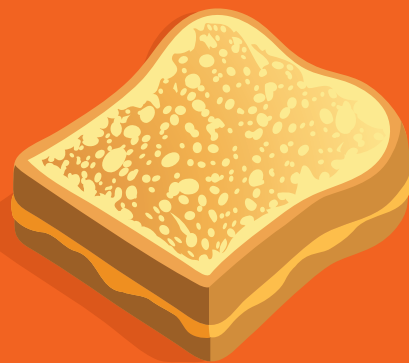
massage, and having a good night's sleep.

You can also add value to your recovery, by making sure the evaluation of the game/event/session is positive regardless of the outcome. Seek feedback from your coach and other people in your support network that can

provide a different perspective and advice on areas to work on.

It is also important for you to self-reflect on your preparation and performance, acknowledging the things you did well as well as areas you would like to improve on. To assist with this, please refer to our **Self-Reflection Resource** and **template**.

A positive way to package the feedback and move on from the game/event/session is to think about feedback using the 'basic cheese sandwich' analogy. In the 'basic cheese sandwich' feedback system, the two slices of bread represent positive feedback and the slice of cheese in the middle, represents a single piece of constructive feedback or an area to work on.



All players/athletes should be aiming to get an idea of the ingredients needed to create their own recipe for success. Knowing what you need to work on and what you did well is the first step to getting that elusive recipe of success.

The above three routines should be part of all your training sessions and competitions. Performing such routines in training helps enable thoughts and actions in competition to be more accurate and automatic.

Remember, like all mental skills, regular practice is essential. The more you practice your routines the more confident you will be, and your performances will become more automatic, enjoyable and consistently successful.

Outlined below is a basic routine **On Your Marks, Get Set, Go!**, you could try!



On Your Marks

Do this well before competition time and remember, this is a continual process that you should be doing – a habit!

Train Smart

- Training is where our physical and mental habits are developed and honed.
- Utilise your training sessions as a key opportunity to learn. Make sure to learn from your mistakes within training.
- Treat training as an important place to prepare for your competitive events – a literal ‘practice run’ to try out and hone your technique, strategies, tactics and importantly, your routines!
- Don’t cut corners and have no regrets. Be smart in the way in which you train.

Eat Smart

Having a well-balanced diet and eating the right foods and drinking enough of the right fluids before and after training and competition, is critically important to ensuring you are fuelled and adequately hydrated so you have the energy to perform at your very best.

Recover Smart

- Making sure you recover mentally and physically from training sessions and competition is extremely important for athletes.

- Recovery may involve eating and hydrating well, stretching, ice baths, massages etc.
- Mental recovery could involve journaling how the training session or competition went and focusing on the things you did well and some things for you to work on for next time.

It also involves taking time to step away from your sport mentally and engaging in some ‘mental pit stops’ like catching up with a friend, cooking, watching a movie or engaging in another hobby. This helps recharge your mind.

Get Set

A week or day before your competition.

- To help reduce some anxiety surrounding a new venue you may be competing at, you can do some reconnaissance and check out the venue and its surrounds. Become familiar with the time and flow of the competition schedule and venue areas (e.g. check-in, warm-up and performance areas, name and phone number of the venue). If competing away from home, ascertain where your accommodation will be and how you will travel between there and the venue.

This can be done virtually or in person prior to the competition starting.

- Equipment checked and bags packed! It is your responsibility to make sure you have all your gear accounted for and packed ready to go – don't leave it to the last minute! If you are having trouble doing this, maybe ask your coach or a parent to help you write a list of things that need to be packed - your own checklist!

- Develop and know your game plan for competition day. For example, a 400m runner might talk with their coach about how best to run the 400m – what is your race plan, tactics, and strategy and what's your plan 'B' if you require it. This can help reduce your anxiety and boost your confidence by focusing on what you can control.

Go!

On competition day.

- Try your best all the time, one step at a time. Focus on the process and the present moment.

- Use your positive self-talk and your routines, e.g. warm-up routine.

- Be a good sport and enjoy yourself. Remember to always display good sportspersonship!



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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