

## MENTAL TOUGHNESS TIPS (By Dr. Alan Goldberg)

**#1 THE SKY'S THE LIMIT** – As an athlete, you are always limited *most* by what you *believe* is possible. When you believe in yourself the sky's the limit. You will regularly do the impossible and turn your goals and dreams into an athletic reality. Belief is the fuel that will keep you going long after others have given up. It will provide you with the motivation and energy to immediately get back up after you've been knocked down, over and over again. Belief is the stuff of champions. When you believe in yourself you don't know intimidation, runaway nervousness doesn't exist for you and determination is your close friend. However, when you doubt yourself and question your ability, then you will continually struggle with sub par performances and disappointment. If you don't believe in yourself you'll struggle with performance problems and have trouble quickly rebounding from setbacks and failure. Keep in mind that it doesn't really matter what *others* believe about you. It only matters what *you* believe. So practice today speaking the language of belief. Eliminate words like "can't", "never" and impossible from your vocabulary. They are negative and self-limiting and will kill your motivation. Instead get in the habit of using the word "can." Assume that anything is possible until proven otherwise. Remember, success comes in cans.

**#2 HAVE A "BIG ENOUGH WHY"** – Want to get the very most out of your athletic ability? If so, then you have to develop what I call a "big enough WHY." What's this "big enough WHY?" It's nothing more than a personal goal or dream, something that is important to *you* and that you *really* want to accomplish in your sport. Your "WHY" could be making the varsity, running a 5:30 mile, getting a college scholarship or even playing in the pro's. What's so important about having a "big WHY?" Your "big enough WHY" will provide a constant source of motivation for you on a daily basis and it will insure that the quality of your training is the highest. When you don't feel like getting up early in the morning to train, thinking about that important goal of yours will help get you out of bed. In the middle of a tough practice, a thought about why you're training hard will keep you going and prevent you from slowing down or giving up. Having a "big enough why" will keep you focused and on track for success. Get one today!

**#3 STAY IN THE "NOW" FOR PEAK PERFORMANCE** – Want to play your best when it counts the most? Then you have to learn to keep your focus of concentration in the "now" of the performance. All too often athletes "time travel" when they compete. They go into the *past* and focus on a mistake that they just made. "What an idiot! I can't believe I did that!" Or, they jump ahead into the *future* and worry about the outcome or messing up. "What if I make another mistake? Coach will bench me." In order to stay calm under pressure and play to your potential, you must train yourself to stay in the "now," focused on what you are doing in the moment. This means that you have to take the game one play at a time, one ball at a time. If you find yourself "time traveling" or leaving the now, then you want to recognize that you've left the "now" and quickly return your focus to the "now," This one, very simple yet critical mental skill is the heart of mental toughness. If you'd like to consistently raise the level of your game, then you must discipline yourself to stay focused in the "now."

**#4 WORK ON YOUR MISTAKES IN PRACTICE** – One of the biggest mental mistakes that athletes at all levels make is to hang onto their miscues or errors as the game continues. Once you mess up, your primary mental job is to return your focus of concentration back to the game. The only constructive time to dwell on and work with your mistakes is in practice, NEVER during the competition. Why? If you start thinking about your mistakes while the contest goes on you, then you will end up distracting yourself from what's important at that moment. For example, instead of being able to read the offense and quickly react with a good defensive cover, you will always be a step behind when you dwell on that last easy shot that you missed. As a consequence you will mess up again. That's one of the most common results when you dwell on your mistakes during a competition. You will always make more of them. Understand that mistakes are inevitable. You cannot prevent them from happening. Everyone makes them. The key here is to learn to quickly set your mistakes aside until after the game is over.