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The 5 Mental Tools of Volleyball

**The information in this book is not
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**This book is dedicated to Team
USA**

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1. Think Gold, Get Gold

Let's get this out of the way, I am a baseball guy. I specialize (primarily) in working with pitchers in baseball and softball. The results I have gotten in baseball and softball over the past four years have been very impressive. At the time of writing this (Summer 2019), 18 players I have coached or consulted with have gone on to play professionally in the last four years (others are currently thriving at the Pro/International level). Other players/clients have signed with high caliber D1 programs. The bottom line is I help people get impressive results if they commit sincerely to what I teach.

“Why is a baseball guy writing a book about volleyball?” You are probably wondering this. Some of the most awesome people I have met over the years have been from the volleyball community. The volleyball community is very tight knit, open and driven to expand. Also, common teachings on the mental side from baseball and softball are also taught to volleyball players. A number of them are helpful and some of them are not. Instead of directly criticizing any figures in particular, I will just write my views and let the results speak for themselves.

Knowing I am primarily a baseball guy, this book should be read with the mindset of “How can I apply these principles?” I may not know the exact terminology or techniques you are used to hearing from your coach, but the model and the principles in this book can absolutely take

your game to unprecedented levels whether you're a contender or Olympic Gold Medalist. I am writing this as if I am speaking to beach players, but indoor players can get just as much out of the material too. If you like the book, please feel free to reach out to me and I will give your team a discount.

A little about my background, I was a pitcher all the way through college. I ended up getting injured after my junior season before I could have a chance to attempt to sign. I got into coaching baseball right after college and have done pretty well overall. One high school pitching staff I have been in charge of had the lowest team ERA in school history. I went through grad school for sports psychology at Long Beach State. One of the classes was a coaching internship where I served as a grad intern for the Dirtbags. I developed the model on the mental side that will be outlined in this book there and without any help.

Even though I had developed all of this great content, I didn't have anything concrete like a book. Big names on the mental side all had books published and were paid thousands of dollars by teams for speaking engagements. Then one day I was at an AVP tournament and I ran into Ryan Doherty. I knew he was an ex minor league pitcher who had converted to being a top beach volleyball player. He has a book published on Amazon called *Avatar's Guide to Beach Volleyball* that is pretty helpful for someone like me who knows very little about how the sport is actually played. I asked him how he got published and he showed me how to go on Amazon to publish books. I organized my

content and have published a few books on the mental side of pitching, catching and scouting for baseball/softball.

I was recently prompted to write this book by an article on Karch Kiraly on his take on “embracing mistakes”. Karch Kiraly is the best male player ever to play the game. On the surface, his discussion looks a lot like the “failure recovery” discourse that is prevalent in baseball and softball. Looking beyond that, what Karch is actually saying is that if you are not making any mistakes in practice then you are not challenging yourself. He is talking about what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2008) refers to as “the Flow Channel”. In a nutshell, a drill should be tough enough that it challenges you each step of the way (reflecting your current level of skill acquisition/development). If it’s too easy, there’s no challenge and it likely results in boredom and coasting. Too much difficulty is not helpful either. Skilled and perceptive coaches (like Kiraly) know how to draw out the best in you.

What Karch is not saying is you should “love failure” or losing. He’s not saying you should focus on or try to make mistakes (that’s ridiculous). Let’s face it, losers love losing. I once coached with a guy who said, “I love losing. You have to learn to love to lose.” If someone says that, it presupposes a bad self-image and they should be avoided. Failure is not the key to success, success is the key to success. Albert Bandura (1997) discusses the importance of building a strong self-efficacy (belief you have what it takes to succeed) as a collection of proximal successes. The word proximal is often mistakenly misattributed as meaning small success. Proximal is actually a relative term.

A proximal goal for Kerri Walsh Jennings is a life time goal for other players. If Kerri is able to make herself one percent better, that's a huge gain. For someone who is usually in the contender's bracket in a tournament, a proximal goal could be to make it to the main draw.

Self-Efficacy comes down to neurological accessibility. In order to determine how confident a player is in their ability, the easiest way to test it is to see how many confident memories they can access as quickly as possible related to their craft (volleyball). A lot of the girls I have talked to on tour have expressed concerns over consistency regarding their serving. Being that I am a pitching specialist, I do have some immediate and concrete strategies to address this issue. How does a pitcher improve both their command and feel with each pitch? I teach them to reinforce all positive pitch executions to themselves and to disregard less than optimal pitches. The more quality pitches the pitcher executes, the sharper the pitches become as a result of the relevant neural pathways becoming dense. This is exactly what I say to the girls regarding serving. I also have another great technique which will be discussed later.

Speaking of neurological accessibility, I'll just mention a common technique that has been propagated for a long time regarding the mental side. It's a technique for what sports psychologists refer to as "thought-stopping". Put simply, having a gesture, focal point or self-talk cue only for when things go wrong is a neurological reinforcement for unwanted outcomes. That would be like me standing by you practicing serves and telling you to only reinforce bad serves and to ignore good ones. My suggestion is to

inwardly (and quickly) celebrate quality executions and to disregard undesirable ones.

Ultimately, the best form of thought-stopping is being in the Zone. The model that will be discussed in this book will actually help you naturally stay in the Zone. One of the best ways to get in to the Zone is the affirmation technique. The affirmation technique is having a word or short phrase that you repeat inwardly over and over. This will be discussed more in a later chapter. The great thing about the affirmation technique is that it reduces the likelihood of unwanted self-talk from taking place. It also sharpens your focus and makes you feel more confident. The possibilities are endless. If you have unwanted inner dialog, it's just a matter of inwardly shouting a word or short phrase that interrupts it. Then just go back to the next play.

The next step is to redirect. Marty Seligman (1991) has a technique that is regularly used in CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy). Marty teaches the “ABC – DE” approach. “Antecedent, Behavior, Consequent – Disruption/Disputation, Energization”. Marty basically suggests to approach unwanted self-talk as if you are a lawyer in a courtroom. He recommends recalling and coming up with as many counterexamples as possible (and to cross examine the thoughts) and then feel good about refuting the self-talk.

What separates the top level performers in volleyball apart from others? For instance, why do some players seem to win a ton of tournaments (and medals), while others struggle in the contender's bracket? Everyone on the pro tour and at the international level has physical talent. Every

D1 player has physical talent. What do the most decorated players in history all have that you too can learn to develop? If you are reading this, it is assumed you have physical ability to compete at the pro and international level. The top players are all relentlessly driven to constantly improve and win. That's not the same thing as saying, "I'll just try my best". They are fierce competitors with insane work ethics. They also have a self-image that is consistent with winning (Maltz, 2015). They are all very self-confident (know they belong at the top), versatile, intuitive, self-driven, stable and aggressive.

Why do certain Olympians seem to win so many gold medals? They win them because they think and focus in terms of winning them. Whether they are consciously aware of it or not, they think only in terms of winning gold. Maxwell Maltz (2015) would say their self-image is consistent with winning gold which is crucial. If you think gold, you are more likely to get it. Visualize gold and feel what it is like to have the gold. The gold itself is a symbol of all of the hard work you put in. Prize money from tournaments and gold medals are not the true end though. Money and gold medals are important, but mastery is the true goal. Once you win that gold or prize money, it's about instantly focusing on what you need to do next to gain further mastery to win more in the future. Mastery (Nolan, 2014) is an end in itself and gold is the true symbol of that.

This book is filled with exercises that are meant to serve as an ultimate guide for your Performance Journal (Kopp, 2021). I recommend writing in your Performance Journal at the end of each day during a tournament. This will give you

new levels of awareness when it comes to the mental side and proprioception (awareness of movements).

Exercise 1 - In the Zone

In your Performance Journal, write in the stream of consciousness form for 10-15 minutes nonstop with these questions in mind.

1. How do you know you are in the Zone?
2. What is it like when you are in the Zone (*What you see, hear and feel. etc*)?
3. What are some of your best performances?

2. On the 5 Mental Tools

When I go out to scout a pitcher, I pay attention to their mechanics as well as their velocity in relation to where it was in the beginning of their outing (also whether or not their precision is wavering). If a pitcher's focus seems to wane or their command is off (velocity dropping), it often comes down to just doing more conditioning (and concentration exercises). A common mistake coaches made when I played baseball and football (it was a given I had to run for track) was by framing conditioning as a punishment. I do my best to make sure athletes know conditioning is for their benefit.

A favorite drill Nolan Ryan used to do was to run in between intrasquad rounds. In other words, he would throw to five hitters and go run ten poles (run from one foul pole to the other). After running the ten poles, he would go back to the mound and throw to five more hitters. He would do this to intentionally fatigue himself and focus on executing quality pitches. This type of template for training can absolutely work in volleyball. As always, please be smart about rest and recovery.

What is the most efficient way to increase your performance? Bandura (1997) suggests one of the best ways to master a skill is to first seek out an elite level performer. Once you find an elite level performer, it is essential to figure out their specific strategy and

approach. Once you gather the strategy, you can then make it your cognitive blueprint of success. Once you have the blueprint of success, it is then a matter of purposeful practice and self-reinforcement.

The cognitive blue print that I teach pitchers is called the 5 Mental Tools (Nolan, 2017). The 5 Mental Tools are the five cognitive patterns elite level performers tend to strongly exemplify on a regular basis. The model is inspired by the work of Cattell (1943), Digman (1990) and Goldberg (1993) on what they call the Five Factor Personality model. The thing I like most about the Five Factor Personality model compared to another common one is that it accounts for the dynamism and fluidity with people. My approach (and view) is the 5 Mental Tools are a set of skills that can be learned, strengthened and maintained with enough effort. This is indicative of what Carol Dweck (2007) calls a “Growth Mindset”. The Growth Mindset is the belief that skills (etc) can be developed with enough purposeful effort and grit.

A personality model that suggests people always have the same type presupposes what Dweck (2007) calls a “fixed mindset”. The fixed mindset is the (false) notion that things like intelligence and skill are static (even scarce) commodities. I bring this up because a common practice in sports psychology is for practitioners to first attempt to determine someone’s “inherent type” and then to determine the right position for them in their respective sport. Some organizations may even go so far as to attempt to predict future promise and

performance based on their current test score. The Five Factor Personality model treats current predispositions as suggestive and not necessarily predictive in the same way MLB scouts view a prospect's performance.

As a baseball coach and mental side consultant, I was also prompted by a common practice that MLB scouts use to evaluate prospects. Dave Perkin (2014) outlines the five traditional tools that are used to evaluate position players when it comes to determining how much money to draft them for. The five regular tools were originally developed by Branch Rickey who was with the Dodgers and is responsible for signing Jackie Robinson. Rickey is said to have made a comment suggesting that there must be a "6th Tool". Dave Perkin's (2014) book just goes to show how ill equipped MLB scouts and executives are when it comes to evaluating (and developing) prospects on the mental side. Most MLB teams have mental skills coaches now, but the real purpose is to empower coaches and players alike with the skills they need so they do not need to go to the mental skills coach's office. Some figures may even play Eric Berne's (1969) game of "I'm Only Trying to Help You" where they intentionally give faulty or subpar advice in order to keep the player coming back.

The 5 Mental Tools are comprised of the following:

- 1. Stability:** Emotional, physiological and cognitive control.
- 2. Aggressiveness:** Intent.

3. **Openness:** Intuition, adaptability and innovation.
4. **Conscientiousness:** Grit, consistency and character (Impact).
5. **Surgency:** Efficacy, efficiency and fluidity.

Bandura (1997) states that the optimal way to model and teach an intricate skill is to condense the essential elements of the craft into a “cognitive representation” (acronym). Robin Vealey (2005) says to craft it into a “useable model”. The 5 Mental Tools model is essentially a neural map for being a major bad ass (even more so than you already are). The next 5 chapters are being written to prime your Reticular Activating System (RAS) for success. The RAS is a part of your brain that recognizes everything relevant to your goal. If you are reading this, your goal is to be an elite level player. The way the RAS works is when you buy a Tesla and suddenly notice them everywhere you go. The same is true for the 5 Mental Tools. I am writing this entire book to set you up for success.

Top performers are constantly driven to make themselves better and are always looking to improve (even if it’s 1 percent which is a major gain). Regardless of what you may have been told or concluded about yourself, you do not need to be “fixed”. A therapist trying to collect “billable hours” might say or suggest that, but it’s simply not true. Even if you are a top performer, I won’t say something like “You’re perfect as you are” either. In my experience, it has been most helpful to treat a player’s collection of current strengths and (perceived?) deficiencies

in each of the 5 Mental Tools as being only an indicator of where they can be in the future. If a player has the physical talent and the desire to improve, they usually do.

Remember, the 5 Mental Tools are a set of learnable skills which can be improved and maintained with enough purposeful effort.

The acronym I (2017) use with pitchers is FOCUS. The results have been really impressive with pitchers over the past few years. They tend to become more efficient, confident and impact type team mates as a result of learning the model.

5 Mental Tools of Pitching

- 1. PRESENCE (Stability)** – *Carry yourself with PRESENCE and have PRESENCE of mind by keeping a next pitch focus.*
- 2. INTENT (Aggressiveness)** – *Throw every pitch with INTENT.*
- 3. TRUST (Openness)** – *TRUST your ability to throw any pitch anytime.*
- 4. COMMAND** – *COMMAND your pitches and the running game.*
- 5. HITTERS AWAY (Surgency)** – *Put HITTERS AWAY without delay.*

The acronym I am going to teach you is SCORE. The object of the game is to win and you do that by SCORING.

Always think offense even on defense. Just like hitting in baseball and softball, it's about production and impact.

The 5 Mental Tools of Volleyball

SCORE

- 1. STABILITY** – Emotional, Cognitive and Physiological control.
- 2. COMPETITIVENESS** – INTENT.
- 3. OPTIONS** – Intuition, adaptability and playability.
- 4. RESOLVE** – Grit, Execution and Impact.
- 5. EFFICACY** – Fluidity, Efficiency and Point Production.

The 5 Mental Tools represent your levels of Efficacy in all of the relevant mental skills. Self-Efficacy (Bandura, 1997) is *the belief in your ability to succeed at a given task*. If you expect to perform well, then you are more likely to do so (assuming you have adequate physical ability). Many years of research conducted by Al Bandura at Stanford confirm this fact. All elite athletes have an unwavering Self-Efficacy. As you will learn in this book, it is a mental skill

that can be developed and maintained with enough purposeful effort (Dweck, 2007).

My favorite chapter in Bandura's (1997) excellent textbook *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control* is "Athletic Functioning". It is the ultimate inspiration for this book. The central theme of the chapter is to collaborate with an elite modeler (coach) who can help you construct a cognitive representation of the essential skills (and sub-skills) that pertain to your given sport/position. The ultimate purpose is to "*merge (cognitive) representation with action.*" This book will help you accomplish that.

Merging representation with action is what Vygotsky (2012) refers to as "Transforming tool and sign". As Paul Baloff from the metal band Exodus (1997) puts it, "*Talk minus action equals nothing!*" Vygotsky (2012) found the more you internalize a given skill, the less you verbalize. You simply produce results. The purpose of Efficacy is to produce results and to make an Impact. Why do you put in the countless hours during practice, training and (hopefully) working on the mental side? So you can go out and compete with INTENT to give yourself the best chance to win.

Self-Efficacy IS paramount to success. However, the definition and application thereof can be enhanced. The various Efficacious athletes that Al Bandura (1997) talks about also likely have what Julian Rotter (1966) calls an internal Locus of Control. An internal Locus of Control (i-LOC) is the expectation that outcomes/reinforcement are caused by your actions. It is the belief that your actions (stemming from thoughts) DO produce given outcomes. Self-Efficacy is the belief that you CAN secure given outcomes. An internal Locus of Control is characterized by controlling that which is in your control and Self-Efficacy is Self-Expectancy. Bandura's (1997) book title contains the phrase "The Exercise of Control" so it makes perfect

sense. If you want to merge representation with action, you need to be strong in both factors.

In Quantum Physics, Henry Stapp (2011) discusses the difference between “potential” and “actual” histories. Basically, subatomic particles behave drastically different based on who is observing them. Their position and behavior is uncertain (Heisenberg, 2007) until someone perceives (and records) them. It is then that they become “fossilized” (Vygotsky, 2012). Quantum Physics is essentially the incorporation of human consciousness into experiments. The human mind is essentially a cloud of subatomic particles and people behave differently based on who they are around. This is what Bob Rosenthal (2017) refers to as the “Expectancy Effect”.

The Expectancy Effect is the influence of a leader’s unconscious expectations on the performance of those they lead. Leaders who expect more usually get more. What you expect of others is often a reflection of what you expect of yourself (your Efficacy). Bob Rosenthal (1966) has a relevant study that focuses on desirability AND expectancy. The Experimenters who desired and expected a given result produced it way more than the ones who had a mismatch between desire and expectancy. So too, the Efficacious athletes Bandura speaks of also probably have an internal Locus of Control (Belief that their actions DO produce results) along with a strong Self-Efficacy (Belief that they CAN produce the given outcome). Their skills (and sub-skills) have been internalized (Vygotsky, 2012) to the point that they simply compete with INTENT.

A recent discussion with Seb Bailey (2021) who is the author of *Mind Gym* shone light on the element of generalizability of Efficacy (or Control Locality). Seb surmised that if an individual has an internal Locus of Control, then they are likely to become Efficacious with the right strategy/feedback. Someone with high Self-Efficacy can also develop an Internal Locus of Control. Just like

Bob Rosenthal's (1966) experiment, it follows that mismatches between Self-Efficacy and Control Locality are likely to lead to inconsistent performance. The good news is that you can strengthen both components by going through the exercises in this book.

I coined the term Locus of Efficacy and briefly discuss it in *The Way of the Closer*. However, for the sake of brevity (and potency) we will simply agree that the word Efficacy combines i-LOC with the traditional definition (Exercise of Control and Expectancy). My improved definition of the word **Efficacy** is *the merging of representation with action*. If actions produce outcomes and actions are shaped by cognition, then it follows that outcomes are usually the product of cognition. *Thoughts Become Things*. You should not only control what is within your control, but it is essential that you also believe that you have what it takes to get the job done (*desire and expect results*). This book will help you develop and maintain a resolute sense of Efficacy. This is the real "Gold Medal Mindset".

The upcoming pages are going to outline the ultimate model for being a pure prospect. The more of the components you exemplify from each of the 5 Mental Tools, the more money you are likely to be worth (assuming you have physical ability). If you are strong in all five of those dimensions, you can be said to exude Pitcher Consciousness. Your current strengths and weaknesses in the 5 Mental Tools are your **Zone of Proximal Efficacy (ZPE – Vygotsky, 1978; Gunderson, 2014)**. The pages that follow will help you scaffold yourself to even more greatness.

Exercise - The AFE (Athletic Functioning Efficacy) Questionnaire

For each of the following statements (Nolan, 2021), please mark one of the following in your Performance Journal. Answer each statement as it applies to you currently during games/competitions: **NA (Never Applies)**, **SA (Sometimes Applies)** and **AP (Always Applies)**. **Simply mark the answer next to each number for the sake of efficiency.**

Please be as honest as possible. The purpose is to simply establish a baseline.

AFE Questionnaire

Section 1:

- 1. I have a consistent Pre Pitch/Play Routine:**
- 2. I am able to consistently regulate my self-talk:**
- 3. I regularly use imagery/visualization as part of my routine:**
- 4. I am able to regulate my physiology and have quality body language:**
- 5. I am able to effectively focus one pitch/play at a time:**
- 6. Regardless of what happened on the previous pitch/play, I am able to focus completely on the next one:**
- 7. I am able to consistently control my breathing:**

Section 2:

- 8. I consistently work ahead in games/competitions:**

9. I am a relentless competitor:
10. I compete with Intent:
11. I am motivated to do what it takes to win:
12. I am able to maintain an intense task focus:
13. I am more focused on my performance than on what people think:
14. I emphasize quality execution:

Section 3:

15. I have a high IQ for my sport/position:
16. I have quality feel for my craft:
17. I have strong instinct for the game:
18. I am adaptable and versatile:
19. I am a student of the game:
20. I have quality Pattern Recognition skills in my sport:
21. I can quickly make the necessary adjustments:

Section 4:

22. I have a Growth Mindset (My skills can improve with enough effort):
23. I have grit and do what it takes to win:
24. I am intrinsically motivated and play for love of the game:
25. I have good time management and organization skills:
26. I am able to sustain intense concentration one pitch/play at a time for the duration of game/competition:
27. I have Impact character and strive to add value to others:
28. I have a strong "Why" and play "On a Mission":

Section 5:

29. I have fluid mechanics and my performance seems effortless:

30. I expect to succeed at the highest level:

31. I deserve to succeed at the highest level:

32. I am a confident player:

33. I am efficient and get the job done on a consistent basis:

34. I compete with passion:

35. There's no such thing as "Clutch", because it always "matters the most":

ZPE Score:

Your Results

For every NA, give yourself 1 point.

For every SA, give yourself 2 points.

For every AP, give yourself 3 points.

Add up your points for each section and put the final number next to where it says “Section”.

You will have a score that ranges from 7 to 21 for each section.

17 to 21 is Elite.

12 to 16 is Adequate.

Anything below 12 needs significant work.

Once you have all of your scores for each of the five sections, simply add up all the scores. You will have a score out of 105. This is your Zone of Proximal Efficacy (ZPE).

99 to 105 is Elite.

90 to 98 is Great.

79 to 89 is Good.

70 to 78 is Adequate.

Anything below 70 needs significant work.

Your current results are only suggestive, not conclusive. They simply reflect your CURRENT reality. The purpose is to simply provide you with a baseline.

Simply retake the questionnaire after going through the exercises in the chapters that are dedicated to each of the 5 Mental Tools. If you put in the effort, I can pretty much guarantee your scores will improve.

3. STABILITY

Just like with what I teach pitchers, it is essential to have quality cognitive, physiological and emotional control during a match. Regardless of where you currently are regarding this mindset, this chapter will equip you with some suggestions on how to be more systematic at improving and maintaining it. The chapter is not all-inclusive to be sure, but it is a great starting point. The most basic principle is to always keep your eye on the ball and follow where it is going instead of where it is (Wayne Gretzky's secret). As I (2017) teach pitchers, it is important to carry yourself with PRESENCE and to have PRESENCE of mind by keeping a next play focus. The most important pitch in baseball/softball is the next pitch because that is where a player exercises the most control. The most important play in volleyball is the one that is about to take place. It's imperative to stay relentlessly focused on the next play for the entire duration of the sets.

-Pre Serve Routine: Going back to the discussion about all of the girls on the pro/international tour who have expressed concerns about consistency regarding serving, this is arguably the most helpful technique to implement. The Pre Serve Routine (just like the Pre Pitch Routine) helps to preempt all of the other issues that tend to arise. The Pre Serve Routine is so important because it puts your head in the right place, helps you

block out/minimize distractions and you learn to associate confidence with going through the routine. I will show you a basic template of a quality Pre Serve Routine. Once you get it down, you can then customize it however you best see fit like the rest of the techniques in this book.

Step 1: Breathe – Whether you’re lining up to serve or preparing to receive a serve, the first step is to breathe fully into your diaphragm. Breath control is essential. The breath centers you and it is the cue to your body (and mind) to focus completely in the present. A great pitcher I collaborated with in the past at a D1 program was great at this. You could see his shoulders rise and fall noticeably before each pitch.

Step 2: Visualize – Bob Rotella (1995) and Harvey Dorfman (2017) both tell stories about how Jack Nicklaus (The Golden Bear) would visualize every shot before he would line up to the ball on the PGA tour. The visualizations would be quick, vivid (combining all of the major senses) and incorporate movement to make a quality imprint on his central nervous system. So too, at the serving line or awaiting a serve, I suggest using the same or a similar approach after taking a deep breath.

Away from the court, you can actually practice visualization on your own any time you want. The book *Psycho-Cybernetics* by Maxwell Maltz has a great technique called “Theatre of the Mind”. Theatre of the mind is where you designate about 20 to 30 minutes where you can sit in a chair and visualize yourself

performing how you want to perform. Maltz presents the exercise in a way that people can visualize themselves having the sort of self-image and being the type of person they wish to be. He regularly cites examples from professional golfers in his book as well. It's helpful to first do some controlled breathing and then to visualize yourself improving/mastering a given skill or set of skills.

***Affirmations** – You can use the affirmation technique to direct your focus and intention when it comes to visualization. It also helps to prevent and/or reduce the likelihood of unwanted self-talk. The affirmation also magnifies the emotional component of the visualization which helps to strengthen the relevant neural pathways. I won't write the affirmations that a number of baseball pitchers use, but the best affirmations are short and concise (Up to you if you want to use that kind of language). Depending on the emotional state you want to create, you can alter the volume and pitch of your self-talk. If you want to get more pumped up, then a loud and dominant inner voice is helpful. If you feel too amped up and want to dial it down, then a more soothing and even inner voice can help.

A few affirmations to start with:

INTENT!

NOPE!

FIERCE!

FOCUS

Dialed In

Next Play

Step 3: INTENT – This aspect is actually a segway into Mental Tool number 2. It comes down to approaching each serve or play with the mindset that what you visualized is real. If you expect to execute a filthy serve (I’m a pitching coach, that’s just the language I use) that results in an ace or a mishandle, how would you approach it and strike the ball? If you just expect to receive the serve and pass it to your partner (or teammate for indoor) smoothly, how would you hold yourself and where would you line up (based off of the intel gathered from previous plays)?

-Posture: The Pre Serve Routine encompasses Selective Attention, breath control, visualization and confidence which are crucial for elite level performance. Another essential component to address is posture (physiology). On the court, you want to project an image of being a relentless competitor.

-Composure: Harvey Dorfman (2017) has a great discussion about composure. He makes a distinction between “Total” and “Partial” composure which is especially helpful. Total Composure is where you show nothing for the duration of a match. Partial Composure is where you may have brief emotional displays but are able to get back to focusing completely on the next

play. In baseball, the two best current examples of this dichotomy are Corey Kluber (Total) and Max Scherzer (Partial). Both of them are Hall of Fame caliber pitchers. If this is a particular area that you want to work on, the techniques and ideas mentioned above regarding thought-stopping would be a useful place to start.

Exercises for Strengthening STABILITY

Imagery

Al Bandura (1997) literally says visualizers consistently outperform non-visualizers on a significant level. He has a whole volume of research that confirms this. Most elite athletes practice visualization in some form. The best among them are systematic in the way they approach visualization (Afremow, 2015). Bandura also says that visualization can be used to enhance your Efficacy.

The great thing about visualization is that you can practice it nearly anytime you want. Your muscles don't know the difference between what you actively visualize and when you actually perform. There is conclusive evidence (Dorfman, 2016; Maltz, 2015) which suggests that purposeful visualization can have a profound impact on your central nervous system, kinetic memory and Self-Efficacy (Bandura, 1997). If you visualize yourself performing a given skill, you can actually improve the skill almost to the same level as if you physically practiced it. You can strengthen relevant synaptic connections by consistently using visualization (Quantum Zeno Effect).

The most common issue athletes face when attempting to practice visualization is "controllability". Controllability (Vealey, 2005) has to do with how skilled you are at controlling and directing the mental movie you

are creating. Tony Robbins (1992 & 1997) advises that it's best to incorporate a lot of movement to overcome this obstacle. *You also want to make sure to combine as many senses as possible.* See what you would see, hear what you would hear and feel what you would feel (physiologically and kinetically). This section is about applying visualization AWAY from the field. It will enhance your ability to quickly visualize each time you go through your Pre Pitch Routine.

Exercise - Go To Your Happy Place (Dugan, 1996)

1. In the classic movie *Happy Gilmore*, a golf coach instructs the main character to go to his "Happy Place". I recommend watching the movie if you have not already seen it.
2. In your Performance Journal, describe your Happy Place as it pertains to your sport. Write for 10 to 15 minutes nonstop describing what you would see, hear, feel and smell. Etc Write down examples of your best performances and conjure up the physiological state you get when you win.
3. Go To Your Happy Place - After you have written about your Happy Place, the next step is to sit in a chair or lie down on a bed. The training table is fine. Close your eyes and go to your Happy Place in your head. Vividly picture what you described in your Performance Journal. Use a mantra to direct your intention and focus.

Breath Control

A key part of regulating your physiological state is having quality breath control. Regardless of the sport you play, it is imperative to breathe effectively. The Pre Serve Routine helps address this crucial factor for stop and start sports. If your breathing is rapid and up in your chest, you are not likely to optimize your performance. You may simply need to condition more so you can acclimate more effectively. *As a general rule, your breathing should be full and down into your diaphragm. Breathe in your nose and out your mouth.*

Exercise - Breath Control

1. Sit somewhere comfortable and try the following activity. Put one hand over your chest and the other on your stomach (Bailey, 2014). Note which hand rises the most. If the hand on your chest is the one that moves the most, it means your breathing tends to be up in your chest. If the hand over your stomach rises the most, then it means you are effective at breathing.
2. In your Performance Journal, write out a plan on how you can more effectively regulate your breathing during games.
3. Patterned Breathing (Vealey, 2005): For 5 to 10 minutes, try a variation of this format. Inhale in your nose for a 5 count and hold the breath for a 2 count. Exhale for a 5 count. Imagine tension leaving your body as you exhale.

Progressive Relaxation

Progressive Relaxation is where you tense a certain muscle group and then relax it completely (Vealey, 2005). A basic template that Robin (Vealey) talks about is where you start by sitting in a chair or lying on a bed (or training table). Start by tensing your calves as much as possible for a 5 count then relax them completely for a 5 count. Progress to your quads and do the same thing. Work your way through each major muscle group. *You can enhance the regimen by inhaling while you tense for a 5 count and then exhaling for a 5 count when you relax the muscle group.*

Exercise - Progressive Relaxation

1. Advanced - “Scan and Release”: While sitting in a chair (etc), notice any muscle groups that have tension. Tense them for a 5 count and then relax for a 5 count. Combine with the patterned breathing for greater levels of relaxation.
2. What variation of the Patterned Breathing and Progressive Relaxation routine can you develop that makes sense to you?
3. How can you relax more (when applicable) during games?

Meditation

Woo Hwang from the TV show *Survivor* is my martial arts instructor. He always has his students meditate before each training session. A key tenet of Tae Kwon Do is “Harmony between mind and body.” The Japanese refer to this as

“Kokoro” (Divine, 2018) which stands for “integration”. Miyamoto Musashi (1994) talks about integrating the elements of “Warrior Consciousness” to fully manifest the “Spirit of the Thing Itself.” He concludes his masterpiece with the statement, “YOU are the Spirit of the Thing Itself.” (INTENT)

The key to peak performance is neuro(muscular) integration (Siegel, 2007) and not “right brain domination” contrary to what some wannabe Zen guru in sports teaches (Jaeger, 1989). You would think a Masters degree in Eastern philosophy would cover things like “Kokoro”. People who are primarily dominated by the right pre-frontal cortex tend to consistently experience negative emotion and generally lack the skills in this chapter (Goleman, 2005). The left pre-frontal cortex is largely responsible for developing and integrating these skills.

There are all sorts of applications for meditation. The most basic way to start is to sit Indian style or in a chair and focus on your breathing. Focusing on your breathing directs your attention (intention) to the present. Remember, PRESENCE of mind. The easiest way to start is to use the template that I mentioned in the Breath Control (and Progressive Relaxation) sections in this chapter. Simply inhale in your nose for a 5 count and hold the breath for a 2 count. Exhale for a 5 count.

If unwanted self-talk, physiological sensations (Damasio, 1999) or images occur, simply note them and go back to counting breaths. In a way, your performance in your sport (stop and start sports) is much like meditation. If a distraction occurs, simply go back to focusing on the next pitch. What’s Important Now? When it comes to meditation, the most important thing is your breathing (or sitting when you get really advanced). The more proficient (less unwanted chatter.etc) you get, the less you will actually count breaths. You will simply breathe and be aware of your breathing.

One of my favorite variations of meditation comes from the excellent book *Psycho Cybernetics* by Maxwell Maltz (2015). The exercise combines Progressive Relaxation with Visualization and Breath Control. Remember the Happy Place exercise? Maltz suggests to start out by sitting in a chair or lying on a bed (or training table). Start by first imagining your body literally sinking through the bed or chair as you breathe in your nose and out your mouth. Get yourself into a state of deep relaxation. Once you are relaxed, then do the Happy Place Visualization for 20 minutes. Use a mantra to direct your intention and focus.

Exercise - Your Own Meditation

1. What kind of a meditation/visualization regimen can you put together based on the skills you have learned so far?
2. How can you set aside 30 minutes in the morning and evening before bed to go through your meditation regimen?
3. In your Performance Journal, write for 10 to 15 minutes on how you can improve your self-awareness (mindfulness) during games.

4. COMPETITIVENESS

Pitching, approaching a mission and playing volleyball all come down to INTENT. It's all about approaching each serve/play with INTENT. This mindset is characterized not so much by how you think as much as what you do. Derek Johnson (2013) refers to this mindset as "connecting the mind to the task at hand". Johnson also discusses what he calls going from the "me vs me" to the "me vs you" attitude on the mound. This is accomplished by the pitcher keeping in mind that the hitter wants to take something from them and they have to make it personal. So too, during a match it is important to remember that your opponent wants to take something from you. They want your gold medal, your prize money and your status.

-Working Ahead: I teach pitchers the importance of always working ahead in counts from both an analytical and psychological standpoint. From a statistical standpoint, pitchers who work ahead in counts tend to have a much higher success rate than pitchers who do not. When a pitcher works ahead in the count, the hitter must then take a more defensive and passive approach. Volleyball is about offense. SCORE as much and as often as you can. Hit, drop, block and ace as much as possible. Do so as relentlessly as possible and do not stop until the match is over. Then get ready for the next match.

-Attack/Approach: Approach each play by attacking with everything you have. Even if you are going for a finesse or a drop play, do so with INTENT.

-Blocking/Tooling: A girl I used to date who played D1 volleyball told me she used to shout “NOPE!” internally when she would go up for a block. This helped her to add power to her blocks while maintaining the acuity to angle her hands to go for a tool each play.

-Hitting: Let it eat! Read the formations, patterns (and tendencies) and then angle your hand to send the ball where you best see fit. Line, angle or drop (Doherty, 2015)? The best players can make that snap judgment (Gladwell, 2007 & Nolan, 2017) in a split second and optimize their approach.

Arm Care/Durability – Like pitching, hitting requires an (unnatural) explosive overhand movement of the arm. Shoulder issues are common in volleyball just like baseball. I am going to suggest the same regimen that I teach pitchers to help optimize your hitting as well as your durability.

A Template Routine to Consider

Resistance Bands (With Handles Only) – The routine is to be done before going through your dynamic warm up before practice or matches. See my YouTube Channel Coach Tim Nolan for a demonstration. 2 sets of 20 reps are what I suggest. I recommend MARV

Bands because of the increased activation in the shoulders.

I's, T's and Y's - Light dumbbells that are used to strengthen the tendons and ligaments in your shoulders (best if done AFTER practice and matches along with 2 more sets of 20 reps of resistance band exercises). 2 sets of 20 reps for each exercise. I have demonstrated the exercises on the Intent Athletics YouTube channel.

Ice and Stim: for 20 minutes after is also great (A lot of players like Cryo Therapy too).

If you consistently follow the regimen, you can very likely expect to gain more power behind your hitting. The ball may find its way through the arms of would be blockers on a more consistent basis. Not to mention, it significantly reduces the likelihood of injury (especially with a balanced strength and conditioning program).

Exercises for Strengthening COMPETITIVENESS

Task Focus

What's Important Now? The task at hand. If you are focused on anything besides the next play, then your focus is in the wrong place. That is the basis of the 5 distractions that were discussed in a previous chapter. They are distractions from the task at hand. *Focus in terms of what you want to do and how you want to accomplish it.* Remember Positivism? You've got to be fully committed to what you decide on during a game.

Exercise - Task Focus

1. What tends to distract you from the task at hand (The 5 distractions)?
2. How can you direct your focus completely to the task at hand?
3. How can you be more intentional in merging representation with action?

Desire

Like in Bob Rosenthal's (1966) study, it is essential that you **DESIRE** the result and **EXPECT** it. You not only need to have an internal Locus of Control (expectation that your actions **DO** produce outcomes), but you also need Self-Efficacy (belief in your ability that you **CAN** produce the outcome). This is why the new definition of Efficacy (merging representation with action) is so important. Desire stems from your goals (that we covered in the Goal Mapping section) and it comes to shape your Reticular Activating System which influences your expectations. As Tony Robbins (1997) says in *Unlimited Power*, "You've got to be clear with what you want. What do you truly want? And why?"

Exercise - Desire

1. A professor of the life skills class I took in Junior College presented us with the following acronym: WIWTHH. It stands for "What I Want to Happen

Here”. How can you apply this to games and business meetings so you can be Productive AF?

2. What do you truly want and why?
3. How can you magnify your desire to accomplish your goals?
4. How can you bring your objectives to fruition?

Execution

Great performances are characterized by consistent execution. Consistent execution requires taking action. You’ve got to approach each pitch or play with INTENT. Keep it simple. Your Pre Serve Routine will help you accomplish this as it is the ultimate way to merge representation with action.

Exercise - Execution

1. How can you take action with your goals?
2. How can you be more consistent with execution?
3. How can you simplify your approach?

Elicitation

In NLP (Neuro Linguistic Programming), there is a method called the “Transderivational Search” (Robbins, 1997). The Transderivational Search is essentially taking inventory of someone’s cognitive representation as it pertains to a specific goal. The key purpose of all of the questions for

each chapter and exercise in this book is to elicit your representational strategy in sports. Good questions direct your focus (intention) and they also activate key synaptic regions in your brain. This is why you want to politely decline asinine or irrelevant questions from reporters (and others). The key to effectively directing your focus and intention is to ask good questions to yourself. When it comes to this chapter, we are going to focus on eliciting your aggression in the context of your sport.

Exercise - Elicitation

1. How do you know when you are aggressive with your approach?
2. What is it like when you are aggressive with your approach?
3. What steps can you take to be more aggressive (if you need to)?

Plyometrics

Want to have a more dynamic approach? It helps to train explosively. I would even argue that endurance athletes should mix in plyometrics to their regimens. *If you train aggressively, you will be more likely to compete aggressively.* As a college pitcher, I used to work out with a trainer who was also a scout for the Mets. The training sessions were always intense and max effort on each rep was emphasized. There was a distinct correlation between the way I trained and how I pitched (with INTENT). Plyometrics are all about “Rate of Force Production” (Clark, 2018). Rate of Force Production is where you strive to move yourself or a weight from one point to another in

as little time as possible. Training for explosiveness is a great way to maximize your ability to compete with INTENT.

Exercise – Plyometrics

1. How can you implement plyometrics into your workouts and dynamic warm up?
2. Write out a workout plan and draw out a dynamic warm up that mixes in plyometrics (especially multiplanar plyometrics).

Relentlessness

One of my key influences is Tim Grover. If you don't know about Tim, I recommend watching *The Last Dance* documentary about Michael Jordan. Tim was MJ's personal trainer from 1989 until he retired. He also worked with Dwayne Wade, Kobe Bryant (RIP), Charles Barkley and various other basketball legends. His book *Relentless* is phenomenal. He describes the ultimate competitor as being a "Cleaner". The Cleaner merges representation with action. They get results and then they quickly move on to the next objective. *Done. Next.* Being relentless is about executing one pitch or play at a time until the game is over. Every game and every season. It also involves staying dialed in with your routines that we covered in the RESOLVE chapter. You can celebrate each success, but there's always another championship to prepare for.

Exercise - Being Relentless

1. How can you be a truly relentless competitor?
2. What would have to happen for you to be truly relentless?
3. How can you maintain an intense one pitch or play at a time focus for the whole game?

Warrior

My favorite chapter in *The Mental ABC's of Pitching* is titled "Warrior". Harvey Dorfman (2016) tells a story about Curt Schilling when he was with the Phillies. Regardless of what you think of his political views, the story adds a lot of value. Schilling was in a bases loaded jam late in the game (with a tight score). He went 3-0 twice on hitters and came back to strike them out. No one scored and he won the game. After the game, a reporter asked if he would have been happy giving up only one run. Here's his response:

"I concede nothing. I wasn't looking to give up any runs. Nothing happens until I throw the ball and I won't give in on any pitch."

Exercise - Concede Nothing

1. How can you adopt and maximize the "Concede Nothing" mindset as it relates to your craft?
2. What would have to happen for you to Concede Nothing?

5. OPTIONS

I have the pitch calling philosophy where I teach pitchers to throw any pitch any time. Really good football coaches like Bill Belichick (it helps if you have Tom Brady as a QB) trust their ability to call any play anytime. They also have a number of option plays to further confound the defense. The best volleyball players also have the ability to utilize any approach anytime. They are marked by a distinct versatility and they continue to adapt in order to constantly confound their opponents. This view may be drastically different from what you may be used to hearing, but my recommendation is for you to consider working tirelessly to be as well-rounded as possible. It's about striving to master all of the key aspects of volleyball so you can feel confident applying any approach anytime. If you are primarily a blocker, you can absolutely become elite at digging and hitting if you put in the purposeful work. Players that aren't as tall can learn to be elite blockers if they work on their vertical jump as well as their timing.

-Perception: One of my classmates in a grad sports psychology class at Long Beach State was on the very successful men's team at the school. I asked him what his favorite aspect of the game is and he told me it's all about seeing the different formations unfolding before they actually do based on subtle shifts/approaches. What he was

referring to is a key skill called pattern recognition. What area or areas of the court are your opponents attacking the most? Do they seem to be on the same page? What areas are they leaving open? Are they an elite blocker (angle, line or drop)? Ask your coaches to constantly mix things up and shift formations at practice to work on this skill.

-Deception: Deception from a pitching standpoint is primarily accomplished from a mechanical/delivery standpoint. It is also done with strategic pitch calling which is based off of keen observations of the hitter on a pitch by pitch basis. It's all about the game within the game. In volleyball, it's important to mix up your approaches and tactics. Bill Belichick will often bring out new plays, formations and tactics that are not on anyone's film just to confound other teams. Right View Pro software teaches baseball and softball coaches the 3 keys to pitching are "Velocity, Control and Deception".

-Playability: Scouts in baseball have the term "pitchability" (Johnson, 2013) which refers to a pitcher's knowledge of (and feel for) what pitch to throw and when based off the intel that they gather on hitters pitch by pitch. Playability refers to your knowledge of (and feel for) what tactic or approach to use and when based on the intel you gather on your opponents. The better you are (or work on being) at all of the key aspects of volleyball (Hitting, Blocking, Digging, Passing/Receiving, Setting and Serving), the better able you will be to use any approach anytime. If you're still skeptical, maybe go ask a player (besides yourself if you're already a gold medalist and/or regular tournament champ). Kerri Walsh Jennings is also

one of the most open minded athletes around and she could probably offer more insights. It's not much of a secret the best performers tend to be strong in this mindset.

Exercises for Strengthening OPTIONS

Complete the Wheel

Chuck Norris (1996) talks a lot about how he and Bruce Lee used to train together. Bruce Lee (1997) invented his own system of martial arts called "Jeet Kune Do". Jeet Kune Do is about Completing the Wheel as a martial artist. He emphasizes the importance of learning the essential moves from a variety of disciplines so you can approach each situation in a unique way. This is what made Georges St. Pierre (2013) such a great fighter. The more options you have at your immediate disposal (accessibility), the better able you will be to optimize your results. Regardless of the sport you play, this approach can help you get the most out of your ability. When working with beach volleyball players, I (2019) talk about striving to master all of the relevant components of the game (Blocking, Setting, Hitting, Serving and Digging. etc). Hitters can learn to block and Blockers can learn to dig. Etc

Exercise - Completing Your Wheel

1. What are all of the necessary skills related to your position?
2. What are your strong and weak points?
3. What steps do you need to take to Complete Your Wheel so you can be confident using any approach anytime?
4. Map out a plan on the steps you can take to master all of the given skills and take action.

Video Analysis

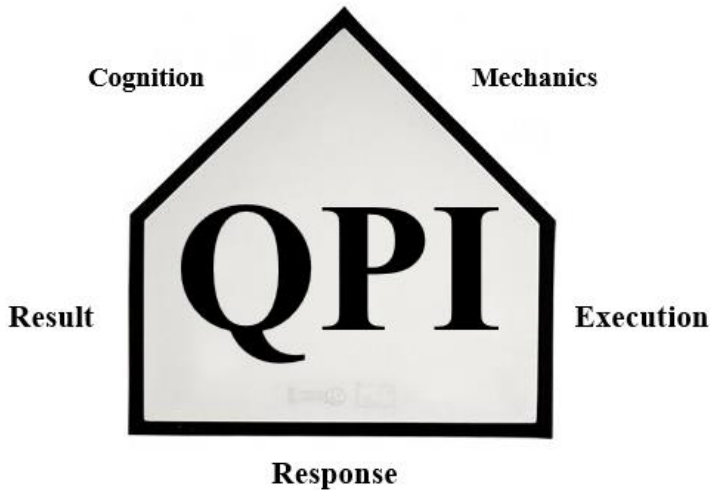
Bandura (1997) talks a lot about the strong impact video analysis can have on Efficacy. His term is “Vicarious Experience”. It is where you are learning from elite models (or yourself) on how to improve your skills. If you’re Efficacious, you will view footage of other elite pitchers succeeding at a given task as an inspiration. The root of it is identification. Do you want to identify with the player being modeled? LeBron James probably won’t say it out loud but he likely wants to be like Michael Jordan. What basketball player doesn’t?

Another key aspect of video analysis is having an elite modeler (coach) break down the film with you. Tim Grover recently posted a video on Instagram about Kobe Bryant. He was very emotional (understandably) and shared a story about Kobe that he hadn’t shared before. Kobe would sit with Tim in his car outside of a restaurant for hours watching game footage on his portable DVD player. Kobe was always trying to look for ways to be even better than he already was. He had a strong enough level of Efficacy where he was unaffected by seeing video footage of himself making mistakes. He also had someone as perceptive as Tim who could help him develop strategies on how to correct mistakes.

Bandura (1997) talks about how intentionally editing video footage until it shows nothing but successful executions can have a strong impact on Efficacy. It’s also great for promoting yourself to college coaches, pro scouts and player development directors. Etc A useful way to approach it is to first watch the video that may have some mistakes in it. Collaborate with your coach on how you can fix the mistakes. Then edit the video until it shows nothing but successful executions (Video pruning – Like the Happy Place Exercise). Watch the edited video whenever you want to remind yourself of how things are to be done.

Besides increasing your Efficacy and promoting yourself, video analysis is also great for building instincts. You will improve your instincts and feel for the game by watching video with a purpose. In *The Million Dollar Head*, I teach scouts (and coaches) the unique scouting system (QPI) I invented while working with the Long Beach State baseball team as a grad student. My pitch charts focus on the interrelation between cognition, mechanics, execution, hitter response and results. It's all about charting the interplay between the pitcher and each hitter on a pitch by pitch basis. Inning by inning and pitch by pitch, a story will unfold. Regardless of the sport you play, you want to be aware of how thoughts influence mechanics, execution, the response of the opponent and how they shape results (also how you respond or don't to results). This approach will give your video analysis skills a quantum leap.

Let's break down the Quintic Psycho-Mechanical (QPI) Interrelation model.



Cognition: This aspect refers to the 5 Mental Tools (5MT) model. If a pitcher is strong in the 5 Mental Tools, then it usually leads to having quality mechanics and pitch executions (but not always). Any deficiencies in the 5 Mental Tools will typically result in various mechanical flaws that detract from a quality execution. This is why the 5MT model is so essential for pitchers to internalize.

Mechanics: This is where the PC-5 scouting system in this book (and *Pitcher Consciousness*) comes into play. What made my scouting reports at Long Beach State so good was the fact that I charted how cognition influences mechanics and execution pitch by pitch. If you learn all of the PC-5 codes and can spot them, you will be way ahead of other scouts (and coaches). Always think, what does the pitcher's

mechanics suggest about their cognition from one pitch to the next?

Execution: Quality cognition and mechanics typically lead to good execution. Many pitchers still manage to execute quality pitches with faulty mechanics and cognition. They would be even better if they could learn the skills in *Pitcher Consciousness*. They can go in the pitching lab and analyze their Trackman/Rapsodo data all they want, but it is a waste of time if they do not improve in the cognitive aspect.

Response: This has to do with analyzing a hitter's swing on each pitch. The 5 swing defects in the TRUST chapter are most relevant here. It is important to be able to spot them and quickly label them just like the PC-5 codes. If a hitter takes a quality swing, then I usually just mark a + sign. If they take a pitch, I write nothing. The various swing defects are labeled with a number 1 thru 5 along with an abbreviation of the symptom (2,sdl – The hitter looked bad on a great slider and took a weak swing. Etc).

Result: This is documented with a traditional score sheet and analyzed by the analytics people. Each pitch is a potentiality and only when it is recorded does it become “fossilized” (Stapp, 2011; Vygotsky, 2012). Sabermetrics are important just like the pitching lab and Trackman. Problems arise when decisions are made only based on data. Data refers to what has already happened. It is suggestive and not conclusive. The best pitchers make adjustments from one pitch to the next based on what they read.

Exercise - Video Analysis

1. Find a recent video of yourself competing and watch it as is. Where is your focus (5 Mental Tools) pitch by pitch/play by play? How does it influence your mechanics and execution? How does the opponent respond? What are the results? Write your insights in your Performance Journal.
2. Edit the video until it shows nothing but successful executions. Post it on social media and tag influential people who can help your career.
3. Watch video footage of teams you are going to play against. Observe the patterns of the relevant players. What approaches do they use and when? How do their thoughts influence their mechanics and execution? What are the responses and results? Write your insights in your Performance Journal.
4. Pick an elite model in your sport that you admire. Watch video footage of them performing a skill (or skills) you want to improve. Write down a game plan in your Performance Journal on how you can develop the given skills (Complete the Wheel).

Creativity

This is an essential skill that they don't teach you in school. Daydreaming with a purpose (visualization) can help you improve your skills and it can help you manifest your goals. Seb Bailey (2014) has an entire section in *Mind Gym* that is dedicated to enhancing creativity. Creativity will help you integrate the skills in this book in more efficient ways and it will help you be Productive AF. One creativity tool that Seb Bailey (2014) talks about is the "Morphological Matrix". It is where you "break down a goal into its component parts, consider the parts separately, and then recombine them to find new solutions" (p. 234). Make a list with three categories: Attributes (component part of the problem), Location (where it will take place) and Item. List as many different variables that relate to each of the three categories then piece them together in a variety of ways.

This touches on the next skill that Seb talks about called "Free Association". Free Association is where you make connections between words or phrases. Try making a list of five random words. Start by looking for how the words are interrelated. The next step is to instantly come up with a word or phrase that you associate with each word you wrote down. Try to quickly write down as many words as you can think of. The next step is to teach yourself to find inspiration from random words, images, sounds, smells, flavors and sensations. How can you find ways to improve your craft in some way? How can you achieve your goals and be Productive AF? Map it out and then refine it like with video footage.

I was a philosophy major as an undergrad and a key philosopher we studied was Ludwig Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein (2009) specialized in logic and philosophy of language. His early work called *The Tractatus Logicus* focused on "atomic facts". In a nutshell, one word

corresponded with one concept or object. It was much like how the Behaviorists view things in terms of “input/output”. The story I heard was where Wittgenstein was on a train with Bertand Russell. Russell casually flipped Wittgenstein the bird in Italian fashion to illustrate the point of the necessity of context in relation to language. This inspired him to develop his theory of “Language Games” that he describes in his later work called *The Philosophical Investigations*. He teaches the point by asking the reader to define what a game is. There are countless ways you can define what a game is and the criteria is different for each (yet they all refer to a game). He encourages us instead to look for “family resemblances” in terms of how we are acquainted with a given concept. You want to think in terms of interrelatedness as it will likely expand relevant synaptic connections.

Wittgenstein’s work on Language Games played a pivotal role in influencing what is known as Solution Focused Brief Therapy (DeShazer, 2021). A key part of Solution Focused Therapy is in coming up with alternative explanations. This is why Mark Divine’s (2018) DIRECT model for cognitive reappraisal is so important. How many alternative explanations can you think of? How many alternative approaches can you use in the moment based on what your instinct tells you during a game?

Exercise - Creativity

1. Start with a list of 5 random words. How are they interrelated? What are the “family resemblances”?
2. How can you develop your own Language Game as it relates to your sport?

3. Think of a key goal that you have. Using the Morphological Matrix, come up with three relevant categories for your goal. An example is: Time Frame, Achievement and Method. List as many things as you can think of in 15 minutes.
4. With the DIRECT model in mind, try coming up with as many alternative explanations as possible to unwanted self-talk. Evidence to support your new and improved cognition (Seligman, 2006).

Focus on Means and Performance

When it comes to competing, it is best to focus on the means rather than the outcome. You do want to have outcome goals to be sure, but during the game you want to be focused on your performance on a play by play basis. If you focus on your performance, the results are way more likely to follow. If you focus on your performance, you will enjoy the game a lot more. Coaches who encourage this approach tend to be way more successful than the ones who lead by only emphasizing outcome. Coaches who focus on outcome tend to produce athletes who play “not to lose” instead of being “in it to win it”. The coaches who only care about means may say things like “I love losing”. Let’s be clear, only a loser says they love losing.

There’s an ongoing debate in baseball that definitely applies to other sports as well. Front office executives and scouts talk about the difference between Winning and Development. In my experience, there really isn’t a difference between the two. At least, there shouldn’t be. You develop players the quickest by teaching them to always compete with a winning mindset (The 5 Mental

Tools). This extends to college coaches who tend to focus only on means and the others who only emphasize winning. You need both components just like internal Locus of Control is a crucial part of Self-Efficacy. Coaches are evaluated based on how well they perform just like athletes. The more you win, the more recognition you get and you keep your job.

Exercise - Enjoying the Game

1. How can you make the game fun?
2. How can you focus on performance during games?

Possibility Thinking

Robin Vealey (2005) talks about a model which she calls “P3 Thinking”. P3 Thinking is characterized by thinking: Purposely, Productively and in terms of Possibility. If you think in terms of the 5 Mental Tools, you will be said to be engaging in Purposeful and Productive Thinking. The purpose of the model is to teach you how to think and what to think (and when). This section will explicate Possibility Thinking. Possibility Thinking is about thinking in terms of what you can do in a given situation. Always ask yourself, “What’s possible?” This mindset will help you with your creativity, your goal mapping and all of the other essential skills in this book.

Exercise - What’s Possible?

1. With your Performance Wheel in mind, what is truly possible as it relates to your goals?
2. How can you think in terms of what's possible on a consistent basis?
3. Looking at your goals from the Goal Mapping section, what is truly possible?

Just Keep LIVIN

In the (1993) movie *Dazed and Confused*, Matthew McConaughey's character (Wooderson) talks to the Quarterback (Randy "Pink" Floyd) about his life philosophy. Wooderson says, "*The older you do get, the more rules they gonna try to get you to follow. You just got keep LIVIN man. L.I.V.I.N.*" You've got to play for the love of the game and find joy competing one pitch or play at a time.

Exercise – Just Keep LIVIN

1. How can you just keep LIVIN?
2. How can you find and keep joy competing one pitch or play at a time?

6. RESOLVE

A term scouts often use to define prospects with character is “Impact” (Perkin, 2014 & Wheeler, 2015). Tom Verducci (2017) dedicates a significant portion of *The Cubs Way* to explicating Theo Epstein’s approach to drafting and signing Impact prospects. Epstein looks for players with character traits like grit, being a good team mate, being coachable and giving back. Jason Turbow (2010) has a humorous and insightful read on how ballplayers can develop Impact traits. Scouts, executives and analytics personnel (managers too) have a metric called WAR which stands for “Wins Above Replacement”. Wins Above Replacement is the measurement of how well the player and the team perform with them in the lineup versus a replacement. Each WAR score equals five million dollars on a player’s contract (Sawchik, 2015). How well does your partner (team) perform with you on the court versus a replacement? Statistics do not always tell a complete story, which is why Theo Epstein goes out of his way to gather as much intel as possible on prospects. He graduated from an Ivy League school and is very savvy when it comes to sabermetrics, but he understands the importance of emphasizing the human side.

-Precision: For pitchers, precision is about throwing the ball where they intend and when. Their Pre Pitch Routine helps to improve this component because precision is tied to the eyes. Pitchers play “mindful catch” (Garrido, 2012)

where they alternate between throwing to the left and right of their catch partner during warm ups. Variations of this could be implemented when you pepper with your partner and do warm up serves (etc). Another aspect of precision is for hitting and blocking. It comes down to being able to hit the ball where you intend and when. If you're blocking, it helps to be able to just know how to angle your hands. However this best makes sense to you.

-Consistency: This component is about mechanical consistency as much as consistency with performance itself. Consistency results from having a set routine that you follow (which can be altered depending on insights and needs). One of the most important things I teach pitchers is the Pre Pitch Routine. Another crucial thing we go over is having a Pre Outing Routine as well as a Post Outing Routine. The routines serve as a foundation for pitchers and they are associated with confidence. Also, going through the routines helps to increase activation, durability, explosiveness, psychological acuity and recovery. I would strongly recommend having a Pre Practice/Match Routine as well as a Post Practice/Day routine.

As I write this, Tom House (He's a legendary pitching coach) posted a great tweet on routines as they apply to professional pitchers. Tom states that it is important to have routines throughout the day beyond just before and after outings (and pitches). We are going to cover everything he listed so you can build your own set of routines to set yourself up for success. I will start by sharing the pre and post outing routine for pitchers to give you an idea.

Here are Tom House's (2021) suggestions:

Sleep: What is your routine prior to going to bed? The meditation and imagery routine in the PRESENCE chapter are a great place to start. You don't have to wake up at 5am or go to bed at 8pm. I recommend going to bed and waking up at times that help you maximize your productivity. Find times that make sense for you.

Nutrition: If you're eating off the dollar menu at McDonald's, you are not taking your craft seriously. It's ok to go out for beer and chicken wings with your teammates periodically, but try to make choices that are going to give you the fuel you need. Try to eat smaller portions 5 to 6 times a day. Lean meats (unless you're a Vegan), fruit and vegetables and Quinoa are always good choices. Try to plan out when you are going to eat each day of the week ahead of time. Be sure to give yourself windows for cheat meals.

Supplements: Regardless of how many fruits and vegetables you eat a day, the best supplement available is Juice Plus. Juice Plus contains over 30 raw fruits and vegetables in a capsule (or gummy). It is NSF certified (guaranteed to be free of banned substances) and it is backed by close to 40 studies published in peer reviewed medical journals. The research consistently shows that Juice Plus boosts the immune system, reduces systemic inflammation (from training and competing) and that it improves cardiovascular functioning (among other great things). www.timnolan.juiceplus.com Team USA Volleyball takes Juice Plus and so do a number of MLB organizations.

Other supplements that can help you recover and increase performance are:

Kre Alkalyn EFX – It is the best form of creatine monohydrate available. No loading or cycling and the results are impressive. This is a great product for building muscle mass, endurance and for recovery. It's also very affordable and free of banned substances. Olympians can take it. Make sure you hydrate adequately (A gallon of water a day). Best to be taken before and after training sessions.

Pre Workout - There are a lot of brands out there, you ultimately want to make sure the one you choose is NSF certified. NSF certification means it is tested to be free of banned substances. A lot of pitchers like to take Pre Workout before they pitch. As with Kre Alkalyn, make sure to hydrate.

Vitamin B12 - The sublingual form of B12 is the best. Make sure the active ingredient is “methylcobalamin”. It's great for energy production.

Protein - Like with the Pre Workout, you want to make sure your protein powder is NSF certified. It's also important that it tastes good. It's also great if the protein powder contains essential amino acids like glutamine which is great for recovery. Protein drinks are best consumed after training (and games). A trick I learned in college is to add a scoop of protein powder to Gatorade during a workout. The carbohydrates transport the nutrients into your muscles.

The Catabolic Period: There's a 45 minute window after your workout where your muscles are most receptive to absorbing nutrients to aid in recovery. It is best to mix protein powder with a carbohydrate source like Gatorade to optimize absorption.

Energy Drinks - A lot of athletes like energy drinks. If you are going to drink them, try to opt for the ones that have a lower sugar content.

Hydration: A gallon of water a day is a good way to go. If you are in hot and/or humid weather, then you may need to drink even more water. Drinking enough water helps flush out toxins and it regulates your body temperature. When can you designate time to adequately hydrate throughout the day?

Workouts: In season, your primary emphasis in the weight room should be on maintenance. 2 to 3 sets of 15 to 20 reps (light to moderate weight) is good. Regardless of the training phase you are in, plyometrics (especially multiplanar plyometrics) are always great to add to a training session. During the off season (depending on your unique goals), hypertrophy and/or maximal strength (Clark, 2018) can help. Hypertrophy is where you are actively trying to build muscle mass. If hypertrophy is your goal, then 4 to 7 sets of 6 to 8 reps (heavy weights) will do the trick. As always, be sure to include a regimen that emphasizes flexibility and range of motion during the cool down phase of each training session.

Here's a sample of a training session format to keep in mind:

1. Resistance Bands
2. Dynamic Warm Up
3. Weights - According to which training phase you are in.
4. Plyometrics
5. Speed and Agility

6. Cool Down - Range of motion regimen and flexibility (Static stretching).

Drills: For pitchers, this involves dry work/towel drill along with using the King of the Hill training device to optimize INTENT with the lower half. It also refers to PFP's (pitcher's fielding practice), pick off drills and working on feel for various pitches during flat or regular bullpens. As Chuck Norris (1996) says, you want to do what you can to "Complete the Wheel". Completing the Wheel is where you do what you can to master all of the various strategic, kinetic and psychological components of your craft. How can you work towards Completing the Wheel in your given sport and position? When can you devote time to working on your skills?

Reading: Tony Robbins (1992) says, "Leaders are readers". Reading helps you expand your awareness and it can help you be more well-rounded. The sources in the References chapter of this book is a great place to start. Ultimately, you want to read books and articles that are going to somehow add value to your craft.

Meditation: I talk about this in the GROWTH chapter, but it is an essential part of your daily routine. How can you set aside a half hour in the morning and before you go to bed to get your meditation/visualization in?

Performance Journal: I teach pitchers to write in their Performance Journal after every time they throw off a mound. This is great for increasing awareness of the mental side and proprioception. So too, I recommend that you write in your Performance Journal after each game with the 5 Mental Tools in mind. You can also write in the journal

after a meditation/visualization session if you have any flashes of insight that can make you better.

Social Media: Trevor Bauer is not only a great pitcher, but he is very adept at using social media to build his unique brand. He has an outstanding agent. Building a social media presence will help you build your unique brand and it can help you get to the next level if you post quality video footage of yourself getting after it in games. Be smart about what you post and when. Try to only post something that is going to add value and help you accomplish your goals.

With these components in mind, simply put together a daily routine that incorporates all of them. Make sure to give yourself some flexibility. Time Management is important, but if you over-schedule yourself, you won't leave yourself any room to be spontaneous and enjoy life. Make sure you give yourself room to enjoy life.

-Ball Control: This is a crucial component for all players and it also pertains to the eyes.

-Execution: Once you gather intel on your opponents using your intuition, it then comes down to execution. During practice, it would be helpful to practice as many approaches as possible depending on the unique sequences your coach throws at you. This takes some creativity. Remember what Karch Kiraly says, it's about challenging yourself in practice so you're ready during a match.

-Impact: To revisit Impact, let's talk about another key component of this mindset. Grit (Dweck, 2007) is about having the drive and fortitude to put in purposeful effort. Intrinsic motivation is about being motivated by a sense of mastery (Pink, 2011) which constantly eludes us. Gold medals and prize money represent mastery in the moment, but it is also a reminder to never be satisfied and to work towards winning more medals and tournaments. If that level of dedication doesn't sound like you yet, you can always develop it. Success is measured by productivity and impact. Always be sure to set your team mate(s) up for success.

Exercises for Strengthening RESOLVE

Goal Mapping

My uncle Darrell (2013) is very successful and he rides his bike 60+ miles a day in his 70s. My aunt Debbie is pretty awesome as well. At a family party, I was drinking beer and my uncle Darrell sat down at the table to share one of his key secrets to his success. *He said you need to begin with the primary goal in mind and then work backwards to the present.* This is called Backwards Goal Mapping. He said you want to determine the relevant steps you need to take in order to bring the goal to fruition. How many calls a day and to whom do you need to make? What concrete actionable steps do you need to take to reach your goal? *Map it out and get after it.* His advice is a key reason why I have been able to write quality books on the mental side of sports. I start with the primary blueprint (5 Mental Tools) and then list out the sub-skills (codes). Once I have the blueprint drawn out, I just start writing until it comes to fruition.

Goal Mapping is crucial for elite performance. You want to have Distal (long term) goals, Proximal (short term) and pitch by pitch/play by play goals (Bandura, 1997; Vealey, 2005). Ken Ravizza (2016) writes about how a **season** is made up of: **Game + Game + Game + Game....** **A game is made up of: Pitch + Pitch + Pitch + Pitch....** Having a goal for each season (Win the Cy Young Award. etc) is important, but how optimize your chances of reaching the goal? By having game by game and pitch by pitch/play by play goals. This is why the Pre Play Routine is so important. Begin with the goal in mind and map it out. Only then can you merge representation with action.

Robin Vealey (2005) talks about SMART Goals and it's a useful template to keep in mind when setting goals.

SMART Goals

Specific - Cy Young Award.

Measurable - You are able to get concrete feedback as to whether or not you are in line to achieve it.

Attainable - It should challenge you but also be attainable.

Realistic - Reflective of what you are capable of (slightly beyond your current ability).

Time Bound - Give yourself a time frame to accomplish the goal.

Exercise: Backwards Goal Mapping

1. With the end goal in mind, what concrete actionable steps can you take to bring it to fruition?
2. What are your career, season, game and pitch by pitch?
3. How can you make them SMART Goals?

Time Management and Organization

The routine and goal mapping sections are intended to help you increase your Time Management and Organization skills. Effective time management and organization will help you tremendously. Remember, you don't want to schedule and plan everything, but you do want to include the components mentioned in the routine section. As I write this, a realtor friend of mine posted a sheet on Facebook with the caption "Productive AF" at the top. The man who is now her husband brought the sheet to their first date because he thought it was going to be a business meeting. The sheet is awesome and I am going to share the template with you so you can be "Productive AF".

The sheet has three primary columns: Things to Do, People to Contact and Things to Buy. Remember Backwards Goal Mapping? This will help you optimize that component. The "Things to Do" section includes all of the components we covered in the routines section. People to Contact also pertains to the social media component. Who can you reach out to that will help you accomplish your goals? You can easily buy a daily planner that gives you a lot of room to write out your daily objectives. You can also use your Performance Journal if that's easier.

Having a daily planner is one of the best ways to become more organized and productive. Being organized applies to your laundry, room, car, bag and routines. (etc) The purpose is not to become OCD where everything has to be immaculate. It just helps with productivity and it says good things about you. An extension of this is dressing well and presenting yourself well. You don't necessarily have to wear a suit or a dress, but it definitely puts you in a better state when you dress well. Joe Maddon's (Verducci, 2017) general rule for his team's dress code is, "*Wear whatever you think makes you look hot.*"

Exercise: Be Productive AF

1. How can you become Productive AF?
2. With the Goal Mapping and Routines in mind, how can you increase your productivity?
3. How can you become more organized and present yourself (even) better?
4. How can you make room for enjoying life?

Concentration

The Quantum Zeno Effect is where the relevant neurons (synaptic connections) are able to consistently fire and wire together as a result of sustained focus. Your sustained focus helps lock in the neural pathway(s) so “cobwebs can become cables”. This is why concentration is paramount to elite performance. You have got to maintain an intense one pitch or play at a time focus for the duration of each game. If you get distracted momentarily, simply go back to What’s Important Now just like during meditation. Harvey Dorfman (2016) has some great exercises on how you can increase your concentration skills. I will also mention other resources as well.

Exercise: Enhancing Concentration

1. Harvey Dorfman (2016) has a classic exercise called the “Concentration Grid”. The Concentration Grid is where you take a sheet of paper (graph paper is great) and make 100 squares (10 by 10 rows and

columns) within a square. The next step is to randomly place numbers from 00 to 99 throughout the grid. You definitely want to make copies before going through the exercise. Your objective is to cross off each number from 00 to 99 nonstop. The better you get at it, the more you can challenge yourself by putting on music or a movie. After awhile, you can make a new grid and put the numbers elsewhere to further challenge yourself.

2. Harvey Dorfman (2016) also suggests to hang a key from a string. Hold the string between your fingers and dangle it with your arm resting at a 45 degree angle. Stare at the key and observe its movements.
3. You can also pick a sign or scoreboard at the field. Simply choose a letter or number to begin focusing on (the spot). Once you are locked in on the letter or number, then narrow your focus to a smaller spot within the spot.
4. Neurofeedback - It is where they hook up electrodes to your head that measure brain waves. You basically play a video game by staring at the screen. If you are concentrating properly, the video game will progress. If you are not concentrating, the game will stop. It helps you rewire your brain so you can stay in the Zone. Simply do a Google search for facilities near you that offer the service. Some Universities may have it.
5. Meditation/Visualization - Meditation and visualization will help you improve this skill tremendously as they both require sustained concentration. Relevant neural pathways will fire and wire together in rapid succession (Quantum Zeno Effect).

Mission

One thing I do really like about Ken Ravizza's (1995 & 2016) work is his emphasis on playing with a Mission. Playing on a mission is all about being in touch with your underlying purpose for playing the game in the first place. Mark Divine (2018) talks about BUDS training in *The Way of the SEAL*. He talks about the major attrition rate of SEAL candidates who don't make it through BUDS training and how the ones who do make it are characterized by having Intrinsic Motivation (A strong "Why"). They also focus in terms of making it to breakfast each day and take things one rep at a time. In short, the SEAL candidates who make it are "On a Mission". So too, you need to have your own mission as to why you play the game. This will add purpose to your training, practice and daily routines. It will also help you be Productive AF. Another excellent book on Self-Discipline efficacy is *Can't Hurt Me* by David Goggins. He teaches you how to challenge yourself and to "take souls".

Exercise - On a Mission (Ravizza, 1995 & 2016)

1. Why do you play the game?
2. What do you love most about the game?
3. What kind of a player do you want to be remembered as?
4. What is the unique brand that you want to build as an athlete? Your agent and/or pr person can help you with this.

Decisions

In *Awaken the Giant Within*, Tony Robbins (1992) talks about how our consistent decisions ultimately shape our destiny. Remember, cobwebs turn into cables. This is why it is so important that you consistently make decisions that are going to help you achieve your goals. You always have a choice. Choose wisely. As Tim Grover (2014) succinctly puts it, *DECIDE, ACT, SUCCEED and REPEAT!* A “Cleaner” (the most driven competitor around) is never satisfied with a victory. Sure, they may celebrate momentarily but they will quickly say, “*Done, Next.*”

Exercise - Good Decisions

1. What good decisions can you make that will help you be more likely to achieve your goals?
2. How can you get better at making good decisions?
3. How can you be more intentional where you *DECIDE, ACT, SUCCEED and REPEAT!*

Control Locality

I had a club baseball coach as a kid who was also the Head Coach at Fullerton College for a long time. Nick Fuscardo challenged me to make three lists: 1. Things that are within my control. 2. Things I can influence. 3. Things that are outside of my control. He probably learned this from Ken Ravizza (1995) as he was a faculty member at Cal State Fullerton which is right down the street from Fullerton College. A lot of issues athletes face often stem from focusing on things that are outside of their control. The

efficacious athletes that Bandura (1997) talks about not only expect to perform well, but they also focus on controlling what is within their control. It is a crucial part of merging representation with action (Efficacy). Something else to consider is that sometimes what or who we choose not to control says a lot about us.

Exercise - What is Within Your Control

1. Like Nick Fuscardi, I am going to ask you to make three lists in your Performance Journal. What is within your control? What can you influence? What is outside of your control?
2. How can you be more proactive about controlling the factors that are within your control (attitude, routines, mental side, effort)?

Leadership

If you internalize the skills in this book, you will likely be referred to as an Impact Leader. An Impact Leader is respected and admired (also feared by the incompetent). Your teammates will wonder why you are so efficacious and productive AF. They will want to know your “secret”. It’s not a secret, they just need to read this book (and take my class). Impact Leadership is about the example that you set and what you model. If you present yourself well and you have consistent routines (along with a quality mindset), people are going to want to emulate you. The skills in this book are ultimately teaching you to lead by example. *You need to establish a standard of intolerance for anything that gets in the way of winning.* If you respect yourself,

people are more likely to give you the respect you deserve. There may be some people in your life who don't add a whole lot of value to you or your goals. This is why you want to audit your circle. Tim Grover (2014) talks a lot about this in *Relentless*.

Exercise - Impact Leadership

1. What steps can you take to lead by example and bring others up to your level? Michael Jordan (Grover, 2014) didn't dial his performance down so his teammates could look good, he inspired them to perform at their best at all times.
2. Audit Your Circle - Who adds value to your life and your goals? Who doesn't?
3. How can you establish a standard of intolerance for anything that gets in the way of winning?

Character

One of my favorite quotes in *The Mental ABC's of Pitching* is where Harvey Dorfman (2016) states the following:

Put simply, people may be shaped; "character" must be formed. To the extent that each individual makes selections of what he defines as "right" and appropriate, and to the extent that he acts upon these selections, he develops his own "character". He is his own man, free of "impressions" that do not last, free of perceptions that do not matter (p. 49)

A major part of character is to “select” your core values that you abide by. My favorite band Pennywise (1991) states, “*Although the masses play host for all the rules, the only rules you should live by, they’re made up by you.*” As a grad student at Concordia Irvine, we were taught the importance of having a Mission, Vision and set of Core Values. Brian Cain (2018) uses the acronym MVP which stands for Mission, Vision and Principles. It is essential that you have unique values that you live by. The mission section in this chapter is a great place to start. Your vision (Goal Mapping) is characterized by the goals you want to accomplish and the type of athlete you want to be. If someone in your circle (leadership) detracts from your MVP, then you definitely want to re-evaluate things.

Exercise - Your MVP

1. What is your mission as a player? Your method of operation.
2. What is your vision as a player? The type of player you want to be and your unique brand.
3. What are your core principles that you abide by (like the 5 Mental Tools)?

7. EFFICACY

This mindset is what Daniel Siegel (2007) from UCLA calls “Neural Integration”. It is where both hemispheres of the brain are firing to form an ultimate awareness which I call Intent. My consulting business is called Intent Athletics. This mindset is also indicative of a strong self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) which is a byproduct of neurological accessibility. How many confident memories can you quickly recall pertaining to a given approach? This is why the Pre Serve Routine is so powerful. Bandura (1997) has extensive research that shows the connection between purposeful visualization and the development (or maintenance) of a strong self-efficacy. Therefore, if you expect to go out there and win then you are more likely to do so. Go out there knowing you have what it takes. Visualize gold (Afremow, 2015) and feel what it’s like to hold the gold medal or prize money. Go get what’s yours!

-Fluidity: Pitchers who are strong in this mindset are characterized by a distinct fluidity in their mechanics. Their movements and delivery show grace. Their fastball has extra life and their off speed pitches have a distinct sharpness to them. This is a sign that they are in “Trusting Mode” (Rotella, 1995) where they trust the training they

put in. They are trusting their kinetic memory and the primary focus is on execution.

Here's an Elicitation Question: *HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU'RE A COCKY PRICK?*

The answer is indicated by how many quality performances you can quickly recall. That is the definition of Self-Efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

A Bonus Exercise to Help You Access and Strengthen the Relevant Neural Pathways:

On a separate sheet of paper, first write down the statement “All of the reasons why I am a cocky prick”. For 15 minutes straight, list all of the reasons why you are a cocky prick and you deserve to succeed. *Prime your RAS for success!*

-Kinetic Soundness: Bob Rotella talks about his distinction between “Training” vs “Trusting” mode. Training mode is where you are consciously working on building or improving a new skill. Effort is conscious and deliberate with an emphasis on mechanics. This is how I teach pitchers to improve their mechanics by having them do dry work. They are consciously building a new neural pathway related to mechanics. A major issue I have seen with pitchers at all levels is that they are (or seem to be) still in training mode during a game. I (2018) call this “mechanical fixation” which is the cognitive preoccupation with mechanical steps. Rotella (1995) and Johnson (2013) both say that it is essential to be in trusting mode when it comes to game time. If you are considering my advice from

the OPTIONS chapter and are working on being more complete, then it's important to make sure that the primary emphasis during actual matches is on execution. Live scrimmages during practice are a great transitional tool. It's also beneficial to consider the Nolan Ryan approach during practice when it comes to live intrasquad. Maybe consider conditioning and plyos followed by scrimmage.

-Serving: The advice from the Pre Serve Routine section in the STABILITY chapter is the best way to improve this aspect. In order to get it down, I suggest working on it during practice and warm ups first. How many different ways can you make the ball move? One thing pitchers are encouraged to do is to constantly work on different types of two seam fastballs that move in a variety of ways depending on hand angle. They also work on varying the speed of each fastball as well as the location. If you have a lot of down time, that's a perfect opportunity to try to develop as many filthy (like a slider in baseball) variations of serves as possible with precision.

-Point Production: Hitters in baseball and softball are evaluated in terms of Run Production. Their job is to produce runs. A pitcher's job is to produce outs. A number of organizations have the analytical philosophical term "run prevention", but I use the term Out Production because it places a pitcher's focus on their objective: Getting hitters out. If you can produce outs and runs as a team, you are more likely to win ballgames. The objective of volleyball is to SCORE and to SCORE as much as you can without stopping until the match is over.

Exercises for Strengthening EFFICACY

Optimism

A lot of D1 and professional athletes seem to exude positive energy. They smile and are generally happy to be playing the game they love. They emphasize Positivism (Dorfman, 2016) and do what they can to focus on what can help them accomplish their goals. They expect the best and focus on the good things in a situation. The wholesome attitude you see from these athletes is something that can be developed. People with positive and dynamic personalities are fun to be around. They also add a lot of value to their organization. Remember, your attitude is within your control and it is your responsibility to add value.

Seb Bailey (2014) and Marty Seligman (2006) talk about how this tendency towards Optimism increases productivity. Sales people at Metlife filled out a questionnaire that measured their level of Optimism. They were then evaluated on how many sales they converted from their leads. The Optimists significantly outperformed the pessimists in converted sales. The pessimists were more realistic about their abilities and the low conversion rate. What they found is that the pessimists gave up sooner. The Optimists kept on making the calls to the people in their pipeline and thus converted more sales. Optimism pays if you want to “Always Be Closing” (Foley, 1992). I’m not sure Alec Baldwin’s character would be too happy with that news.

In Marty Seligman’s (2006) excellent book *Learned Optimism*, he discusses the contrast between Optimism and

pessimism. Optimists view positive results and traits as being Permanent, Pervasive and Personal. Setbacks are viewed as Temporary, Specific and External. Moreover, positive attributes are viewed as Traits (Rosenthal, 2017) instead of states. I treat the 5 Mental Tools as Traits and the 5 Barriers as states. If you want to maximize your Optimism, the skills in this book will help you accomplish this.

Dan Pink (2013) has a useful suggestion on maintaining Optimism in his great book *To Sell is Human*. He talks about a concept called “Buoyancy”. Buoyancy has to do with the ratio of positive to negative thoughts and emotions you experience. Dan suggests the optimal ratio as being 5 to 1. You want to strive to have five positive thoughts/emotions for every one negative one. If you maintain a positive mood (Optimism), it will help you increase your performance in your sport. I saw a video of Usain Bolt on LinkedIn at the Olympics. Before his race, he was smiling and giving fist bumps to the volunteers. He was happy to be there. It also says a lot about him that he was being nice to the volunteers.

Exercise – Optimism

1. How can you maintain a sense of Buoyancy?
2. How can you increase your Optimism?
3. What all are you grateful for?
4. What are the positive things in your life that you can focus on?

Passion

Elite players are passionate about their sport. They dominate their sport and grow it as a result of their increased notoriety. If you want to compete at the highest level, it is essential that you have passion. Some people may detest this (pessimists), but that's only because you probably make them feel inadequate. Marcus Stroman posted a Tweet that reads, "*Confident people make unconfident people uncomfortable*". Michael Jordan never dialed back his ability so his teammates could look good. He brought them up to his level. The same was true with Kobe Bryant. The Mamba was concerned with scoring. That's what he was paid to do. MJ and Kobe were both very passionate about constantly improving so they could continue to dominate the NBA.

Exercise – Passion

1. What about your sport are you passionate about?
2. How can you maintain passion for your sport?
3. In what ways can you grow the game by dominating it?

Enactive Mastery

Nothing breeds success like success. A key part of developing and maintaining Efficacy is what Al Bandura (1997) calls Enactive Mastery. It is the accumulation of proximal successes. Every time you accomplish a goal, it is

important to reinforce it to yourself. Celebrate inwardly and then move on to the next goal. This also applies to skill acquisition and performance. Every time you execute a quality play (etc), celebrate inwardly. You will give yourself momentum to succeed in the future. This is why Synaptic Pruning and Self-Directed Neuroplasticity work. The more successes you accumulate, the more you will turn cobwebs into cables.

Exercise – Celebrate Your Successes

1. What victories can you celebrate?
2. How can you be more intentional about inwardly reinforcing all positive executions in your sport?
3. How can you reward yourself after you achieve each goal?

Self-Image

An excellent book on this subject is *Psycho Cybernetics* by Maxwell Maltz (2015). The basic premise of the book is that you can't outperform your self-image. Maxwell Maltz was a premier plastic surgeon. He found that people would get various procedures done and they would still come back to him claiming to be "ugly". It was their self-image that was "ugly". This also applies to sports performance and he talks a lot about golf in the book. He started "prescribing" visualization exercises to clients and often talked himself out of surgery.

A key part of having a quality self-image that is consistent with elite performance is believing you deserve to succeed. There is a concept in psychology called “Imposter syndrome”. It is the notion of many talented people that they might be revealed as not being as great as people think. It’s part of having a fixed mindset. It is essential that you not only expect to succeed but that you also deserve to succeed. You deserve to date someone awesome. You deserve to be respected and to dominate the game. It is also important that you accept and approve of yourself. If you accept yourself, you won’t care as much about the approval of others.

Exercise – Self-Image of Success

1. In your Performance Journal, write down 50 reasons why you deserve to succeed. These can be Traits as well as positive feedback from others that are line with being successful. List them all in a row nonstop.
2. Write up a blue print (cognitive representation) of your ideal self-image. Who is the sort of person you want to be?
3. Use the Happy Place exercise and visualize yourself being the sort of person that you mapped out in step 2. The more you do this exercise, the more likely you will be to shape your self-image.

Expectancy

If you expect to perform well then you are more likely to do so. It is also important that you desire the results along with expecting them. Why are baseball players so cocky? Because they expect to succeed. They have learned to celebrate their successes and use it as momentum to achieve future success. Elite performers trust the training they have put in and they expect to get the job done. This is a mindset that you can develop as well. My high school pitching coach was an ex pitcher from the Detroit Tigers organization. He used to always say, “You’ve got to be a cocky prick.” It’s absolutely essential if you want to thrive at the highest level.

Exercise – Being a Cocky Prick

1. How can you be more of a cocky prick?
2. Write down 50 reasons why you expect to succeed.
3. How can you help your teammates be cocky pricks?

Team Culture

Successful teams have what Al Bandura (1997) calls a strong “collective efficacy”. This simply means that the team culture consists of a group of cocky pricks that desire and expect to win. In *The Million Dollar Head*, I talk about the importance of drafting and trading for players who can contribute to a winning culture. Organizations that win on a consistent basis have a philosophy that emphasizes winning

and development. As we discussed earlier, winning and development are not mutually exclusive (nor should they be).

Teams that win on a consistent basis have a standard of intolerance for anything that gets in the way of winning. The best coaches are able to get the players to hold each other accountable. This does not necessarily mean that star players need to “subjugate their personal interests for the sake of the team”. It is in the interest of the team for star players to pursue their interests. Phil Jackson wouldn’t have told Kobe or MJ to dial back their interests for the sake of the team. They were THE team. It was in the interest of the team for them to score as much as they possibly could.

In his great book *They Bled Blue*, Jason Turbow (2019) talks about the culture of the 1981 Dodgers that Tommy Lasorda (RIP) built. If one guy hit a home run, the next guy would want to hit an upper decker. If a guy threw a shut out, the next guy wanted to throw a no hitter or perfect game. Jason sent me a Tweet that read, “*On great teams, intramural motivation is real.*” The players from the Bulls during the 1990’s put up phenomenal numbers as a result of Michael Jordan’s leadership. They couldn’t replicate their performance after leaving the Bulls because they no longer had MJ to lift them up. MJ shaped and defined the culture of winning. The documentary *The Last Dance* is instructive in this regard.

In college, I had a buddy who was on a D1 baseball team. I attended a party that was put on by the team. Their team culture was evident by the way the guys approached

beer pong and flip cup. The emphasis was on constantly challenging each other to focus one toss or flip at a time. They were very proficient at modeling “Positivism”. They expressed things in terms of *what they wanted to do and how to do it*. At the time, I actually developed what would turn into the Pre Pitch Routine. I would actually visualize the ping pong ball going into the cup or the cup landing right side up on the first attempt. We constantly challenged players from other sports at the school and kept winning. It was a brilliant form of team building to emphasize collective efficacy.

Exercise – Team Culture

1. How can you shape and define a culture of winning?
2. How can you establish a standard of intolerance for anything that gets in the way of winning?
3. How can you hold yourself and your teammates accountable to stay dialed in with the winning culture?

Mastery Potential

In an unpublished manuscript (2014) titled *Mastery Potential*, I talk about being relentless driven to master (Pink, 2011) the craft of pitching. Greg Maddux (Dorfman, 2016) defined the success of each outing by the ratio of quality pitches he executed to the ones that weren't. If he had a good ratio, he was happy with the outing regardless of the actual outcome. I also discuss this theme in *The 5*

Mental Tools of Volleyball. The best players are driven to constantly master the game.

So too, I suggest that you constantly strive to master the mental side (skills in this book) as well as the physical/tactical (Complete the Wheel) components of your craft. True mastery is something that will constantly elude you. This is what will keep you engaged so you return to the field ready to get after it anew each day. Is it easy for you to dominate the game? You can become more engaged by setting more challenging goals for yourself. Always look for ways to be more efficient merging representation with action.

Exercise – Mastery

1. How can you set more challenging goals for yourself?
2. What components (mental and physical) of the game do you still have yet to master?
3. How can you maintain a constant pursuit of mastery?
4. How can you increase your efficiency?

“Pressure is a Privilege.”

The opening chapter of my book *The Way of the Closer* is the quote from Tim Grover (2015). During an interview with Tai Lopez about his book *Relentless*, Tim said, “Pressure is a privilege.” As a former Closer, I can attest to

this mindset. The coach used to put me in games to face the 4, 5 and 6 hitters with runners on base in tight games. People used to ask if I was bothered that coach would put me in those situations. I would reply that I loved being in those game situations. I converted all 7 Saves in the 7 opportunities I had.

Your coach wouldn't throw you to the wolves if they didn't think YOU are a wolf. The skills in this book will help you be the Big Bad Wolf. Howl inwardly while reciting your mantra if you want. A lot if it has to do with your appraisal and perception. The only real pressure you should feel is the pressure you put on yourself. It is all about being relentlessly driven to win. This is accomplished by focusing on your performance one pitch or play at a time.

Exercise – “Pressure is a Privilege.”

1. How can you put pressure on yourself to succeed on an even greater level?
2. What are some goals that can really stretch your ability?
3. How can you stay dialed in one pitch or play at a time regardless of the game situation?

In the Zone

Why does Ken Ravizza (1995 & 2016) talk about how the Zone is something that “only happens so often”? That's

because he doesn't teach a consistent strategy on how to get and stay in the Zone. The 5 Mental Tools represent the very fabric of the Zone. The sub-skills within each of the 5 Mental Tools will help you consistently think and focus in ways that will help you stay dialed in one pitch or play at a time.

As was promised, I am going to teach you a technique that will help you access the Zone nearly anytime you want. Remember State Dependent Learning and Hebb's Law? We are going to get you to access the Zone State and cause it to wire with a given gesture or focal point. It's a technique I learned from Tony Robbins (1997) called "Anchoring". It is where you intentionally teach yourself to associate a given state with a relevant cue.

Exercise – The Zone Anchor

1. First determine if you are a visual, auditory or kinesthetic learner.
2. If you are a visual or auditory learner, then you will want to pick a physical cue/gesture (like making a fist or pressing your thumb and middle finger together). If you are a kinesthetic learner, you will want to pick a focal cue (something to stare at that you will have during games).
3. Remember the Happy Place exercise? You are going to go to your Happy Place, except you are going to magnify the physiological state of being in the Zone. Feel what you would feel, see what you would see and hear what you would hear. Etc Make sure the feeling is a 10 out of 10. A mantra can be

used to magnify this aspect and direct your intention.

4. While going to your Happy Place and magnifying the state, either use your gesture (make a fist. Etc) or stare at your chosen focal point depending on your learning style.
5. Go to your Happy Place while holding the gesture or focal cue for 5 to 20 minutes.
6. After the time has elapsed, let go of the gesture or stop staring and wait for 30 seconds.
7. After 30 seconds has elapsed, use your gesture or focal cue and see what happens.

You can now access your Zone state nearly anytime you want during games just by using the gesture or focal cue. The more you do steps 3 through 7, the stronger the synaptic connections will be in your brain. It will become easier and easier to access your Zone state as a result (remember the Quantum Zeno Effect?).

###

You now have all of the tools necessary to succeed at the highest level. My recommendation is to write in your Performance Journal after every game and to revisit the various exercises. The more you do each exercise, the thicker the cortical regions in your brain will become. If you apply the material in this book, you will see results. People are going to notice the shift within you and they are going to ask what your “secret” is. Be a good teammate and be sure to tell them about this book. Every time you step into the Zone, *you own time*.

Exercise – Your 5 Mental Tools

1. What 5 letter word/acronym can you use to sum up the 5 Mental Tools (Self-Regulation, Aggressiveness, Versatility, Self-Discipline and Efficacy)? How can you transform SCORE into your own model?
2. These are the core Principles for your MVP.
3. How can you integrate the 5 Mental Tools into your routines and daily operation at the field/court?

Think Gold, Get Gold!

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Also By Tim Nolan

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