

Dr. Kays' Mental Tips for Coaches / Teams

SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

IMPROVING YOUR ATHLETE'S FOCUS IN PRACTICE

As a coach, certainly you have noticed athletes who come to practice with other things on their minds. They may be preoccupied by school concerns, financial issues, homework overload or relationship stress. You need to develop ways for your athletes to become focused before practice, so the quality of their practice is better. With higher quality practice comes better practice performance, which then leads to higher confidence and better performance in competition. Think of this preparation as part of actual practice, not something as *"if time permits."*

Here are four ideas:

- + **Blow a whistle or horn to let players know they have five minutes before practice officially begins.** This signal indicates they need to begin turning their complete focus and energy toward the practice ahead, their objectives and visualization of themselves accomplishing these goals.
- + **Have them complete a journal entry.** I have all athletes write in journals. For increased focus in practice, have them complete journal entries at the start, writing about their goals and how they are going to accomplish them. They can then begin to journal before arriving at practice.
- + **As players are warming up and stretching, require silence.** This time period can be used to mentally get ready for practice, thinking about their objectives and visualizing themselves successfully accomplishing their goals.
- + **Develop consistent routines.** The purpose of routines is to help athletes focus. Most athletes have pre-game routines, but you can help them build pre-practice routines. Routines increase focus and help reduce outside distractions.



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Dr. Kays is a sport and performance psychologist and has a passion for helping athletes and coaches overcome mental barriers to achieve their performance goals.

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