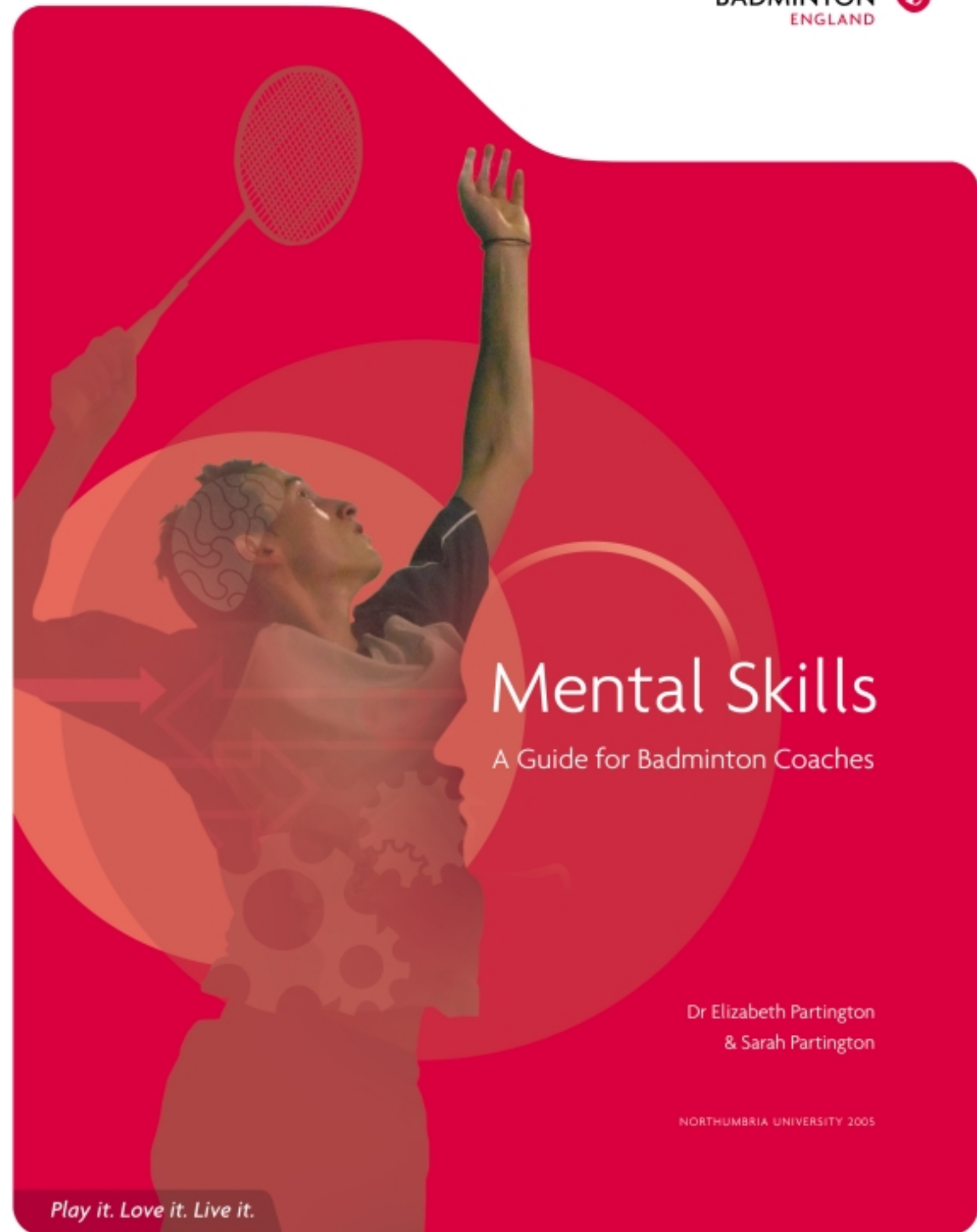


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Mental Skills

A Guide for Badminton Coaches

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SECTION 1

How to use this book

1.1 What is the purpose of this book?

The aim of this book is to provide you as a badminton coach, with the skills necessary to implement mental training programmes with your athletes. In simple terms this is a guide to practical sport psychology techniques that you can work through with your athletes to help them to get the best out of their training and competition. The intention is to enable you to feel confident and comfortable teaching these strategies.

1.2 Who is the book for?

'Mental skills for Badminton' has been written specifically for badminton coaches. All techniques are discussed in clear and simple language with an emphasis is on practical and concrete strategies. This resource has been designed to be used by a beginner to the world of sport psychology.

1.3 How can you get the most from this book?

This book is intended as a self-help guide, and therefore it should be seen as a resource that you should use to guide your mental training programme. The book has been divided in to eight separate sections; a how to section, an introductory section, and a section on each of the different age-matched stages. Each of the age-matched stages sections contains information and instruction on techniques that are specific to players at that stage. Each technique is briefly described and explained, and then practical exercises are provided that you can try with you athletes.

Although you may be most interested in the stage that is relevant to your players, it is recommended that you read through all sections of this book before you begin any mental training. This will provide you with an overview of how the techniques are progressed and how early work can form the foundation for more advanced techniques. It will also provide you with a clearer understanding of sport psychology, and enable you to gain a greater understanding of the background to the different techniques.

1.4 Accessing the programme

Although this programme is designed to take a player from the age of 6 years to adulthood, it is likely that players will join the programme at various stages. This situation is obviously not ideal and poses a real problem for the coach. What do you do with a 16-year old player who joins the programme for the first time and has no prior experience of sport psychology?

Any player over the age of 12 years who is new to sport psychology should pick up the programme at the 'Training to Train' stage. This will provide a general introduction to the advanced skills, which will enable them to progress to the later stages where they will tailor the skills to their individual requirements. It is vital that players are introduced to these advanced skills in order for them to be able to implement the techniques in a competitive situation. However, if you find that your players struggle with the skills then take them back a stage to 'Learning to Play.'

SECTION 2

Introduction to sport psychology

2.1 What is sport psychology?

Sport by its very nature presents both a physical and mental challenge. When competing you are asked not only to push your body to the limit, but you must also have the mind set for success. A top badminton player must be able hold his/her nerve under pressure conditions such as receiving or serving at match point. The ability to maintain high levels of concentration throughout long rallies is essential, as is having the confidence to believe that you can succeed. Finally, an elite level athlete must have the motivation to get out and train day in day out, and to keep going even when a match appears to be slipping away. Sports psychologists have realised that what is going on in the mind is often translated into physical performance. Those players, who are mentally the toughest, are likely to be the most successful. Sport psychology involves applying the principles of psychology to sport in order to train athletes to become mentally tough and to win the mental game.

2.2 What do sport psychologists do?

Sport psychologists help athletes to develop their mental skills to enhance their training and competitive performance. Think of a sport psychologist as a mental coach in the same way that a player will receive coaching in the physical, tactical and technical aspects of the game. Just like physical skills, mental skills can be trained and developed. However, just like physical skills this requires instruction and practice. Most players will spend a good deal of time faithfully putting in the technical practice on court and the physical work in the gym or out pounding the pavements yet very few athletes work on their mental skills. Sport psychologists create mental training programmes that involve athletes practising and utilising specific strategies designed to enhance the key psychological skills.

2.3 The key mental components

Sport psychologists have identified four key mental components that are necessary for success. These key skills are confidence, concentration, motivation and handling pressure.

CONFIDENCE/FOCUS

One of the most consistent findings in sport psychology is the link between confidence and success. Confidence breeds success and success breeds confidence. In other words, those who are confident tend to be successful. Success then makes people more confident, which then makes them more successful and so on. We know that the biggest difference between confident and diffident athletes is the way in which they think about themselves and their performances. Thoughts have a huge impact on performance. What we 'think' affects how we 'feel' and ultimately how we 'behave/perform'.

Confident athletes say positive things to themselves and think about successfully mastering challenges, rather than focusing on possible failure. In this way the thoughts that they have can be an asset to performance. In contrast, athletes who lack confidence tend to have negative thoughts, berating themselves, dwelling on mistakes and worrying about future events. With practice, players can learn to identify the kinds of thoughts they are having and to replace negative thoughts with positive ones, thus paving the way for confident and successful performances. The key to gaining control of thoughts is self-talk.

CONCENTRATION

At the top level even a momentary lapse in concentration can make the difference between winning and losing. It is easy to become distracted by the noise of the crowd, by the game that is taking place on the next court, by the expression on a coach's face, even by irrelevant or negative thoughts in your own head. In simple terms concentration involves focusing all your attention upon the cues that are relevant to the task, and blocking out any distractions.

In order to improve concentration, players must first know what to concentrate on. What are the important cues that they need to pay attention to and which cues are mere distractions? Once they can differentiate between relevant and irrelevant cues they need to practice focusing upon the correct cue and blocking out distractions. Next, they may need to be able to quickly shift their attention for example from looking at the shuttle to looking at the positioning of their opponent. Finally in sports such as badminton where the action is stop-start and games can take place over a prolonged period of time, it is unrealistic to expect the athlete to sustain long periods of concentration. It is vital therefore to be able to 'switch on' and 'off' at the appropriate time.



SECTION 3

FUNdamentals Phase two (Males 6-9, Females 6-8)

MOTIVATION

The life of a top badminton player can be tough. It takes endless hours of training to make it to the top, and some days it is harder than others to get out on the court or in to the gym and put in the necessary work. However, as every coach knows high quality training is the key to success, and in this day and age players cannot afford to waste training sessions. It is therefore vital that players can motivate themselves to get out there and make the most of their training sessions.

Motivation for training is only one aspect of motivation that is required for elite badminton. The top player must also be motivated to give his/her best for every minute of every game. This means being psyched up and ready to play in the early rounds of competition even against far inferior competition. It also means staying positive and maintaining that will to win when things aren't going so well or when the opponent appears to be unbeatable. These are skills that sport psychologists consider vital for success.

HANDLING PRESSURE

Elite sport is a pressure cooker environment with massive potential for producing stress. This is after all what makes sport so intense and exciting. Indeed the ability to cope with pressure is essential for success. To make it to the top an athlete must be able to perform in that crunch situation, in that vital match when the score line is tight and an Olympic gold medal is up for grabs.

Too much anxiety can be extremely detrimental to performance. Anxiety increases the amount of tension in the muscles, which interferes with speed and co-ordination. It also produces negative thoughts and worries that can erode confidence and distract attention. It is vital that athletes learn to gain control of their feelings of anxiety and do not allow these feelings to ruin their performance. Although most of us probably imagine that relaxation is easy in fact true relaxation, particularly in a pressure situation, is a skill that must be learnt and practiced.



The aim of this stage is to introduce players to the foundations of mental training to prepare them for the more structured training in later stages/years. The intention should be to keep it light and fun and to integrate mental training with physical and technical training so that players accept it as a recognised part of their programme.

3.1 Enjoying competition

It is not until the age of 5 or 6 that children begin to compare their performances with those of other children in order to evaluate their own ability. Once they reach the age of 6-7 years they are likely to attempt to turn most activities into competitive ones. However, at this age they have no real concept of ability and do not see it as a limiting factor on performance. Instead children often think that outcomes are a result of effort, i.e. the people who win are the people who try the hardest. It can sometimes be difficult for a child of this age to understand why they cannot win when they have tried their hardest. This can turn competition into a frustrating and unpleasant experience.

Obviously outcomes are an important part of competition, but it is important at this stage for you to teach children that there is more to competition than just winning. Many older athletes perceive of competition as a threat. They are afraid of failure and see competition as an opportunity to go out there and 'get it wrong, to let themselves and others down.' As sport psychologists we would prefer players to take a much more positive view of competition. We want them to see competition as a challenge, a chance to get out there and show what they are capable of and not to think about getting it wrong. Many players find this very difficult as they are too caught up in the importance of the outcome. They are worried about the consequences such as: What happens if I lose? What happens if I don't get any points?

If a player is focusing on improving aspects of his/her performance and is not worrying about the consequences of the competition then he/she is likely to feel less nervous, be more focused and feel more confident. Usually if you focus on getting your performance right you should get the outcome that you want.

It is important to get players to approach competition in the right way from an early age so that they learn to enjoy competition rather than to be afraid of it. The way to do this is to ask them to focus on their own performance rather than the outcome. It is important to get away from the 'winning is everything' mentality. When you introduce competitive elements into your practices and drills, encourage your players to compete against themselves rather than others. You want to challenge them to do their best.

You can help by giving them one thing to focus on in a game, for example trying to keep their racket head up or hitting the shuttle in the middle of the racket, whatever is appropriate to their playing capabilities. At the end of the game you should provide feedback on their performance of this one particular task. That way they learn that win or lose they can still gain something from the game. Players will also realise that you value more than just the outcome.

3.2 Respecting your opponent

It is between the ages of 6 and 9 years that children begin to become really involved with other children, and reduce the self-centred mentality characteristic of the early years. This makes the FUNdamentals stage the perfect time to teach young players some of the important behavioural qualities that are required of a badminton player. Perhaps the most important of these is good sportsmanship, in other words demonstrating respect for their opponent. As children begin to make comparisons between themselves and other children, they form an understanding of the notion of taking on different roles (mostly through make-believe and school yard games).

As a coach there are certain things that you can do to encourage your players to show respect for their opponents. For example;

- Lead by example by always showing respect for your players and do not openly criticise them
- Include practices into your training sessions to encourage your players to applaud a good performance
- Insist that your players always shake hands at the end of practice games,
- Ask your players to always try their hardest no matter who they are playing against (i.e. do not ridicule an inferior opponent) and that negative (mean) comments are not allowed

Practical Exercise

Set up a small practice drill that lies within the capabilities of the group. This should be a fun game that the children will enjoy.

To start with there should be one very simple rule, for example they each must take a turn at hitting the shuttle back to you, or they are only allowed to go into certain parts of the court. If anyone breaks the rule then they are 'out' and no longer allowed to participate in the game. As the group ages, you could introduce more than one rule per game.

3.3 Rules of the game

Around the age of 7-8 years children have reached a level of development that allows them to benefit and enjoy comparing their abilities to those of other children. However, it is not usually until the age of around 10-12 years that children possess the ability to be objective and fully understand the point of view of others. This may make it a little difficult to teach younger children the value of rules because you cannot reason with them in the way you can with older children, teenagers and adults. However, even children as young as 6 years old create simple rules for their own make believe games, and it is possible to introduce some rules at this stage.

The key thing to remember here is to keep it simple. The point that you need to get across here is that rules exist so that everyone knows what they can and cannot do.

3.4 Code of conduct

In addition to learning the rules of the game it is important that players learn appropriate and acceptable standards of behaviour. When dealing with older players it is possible to sit down as a group and decide on a set of appropriate standards of behaviour that everyone in the group is willing to agree to. Sport psychologists often call these behavioural contracts.

- Players produce a list of acceptable behaviours such as for example turning up to training on time, helping to set up and clear away the equipment, always providing positive encouragement or constructive criticism, always providing good quality feeding etc.
- They then devise a list of penalties for breaking each of the agreed 'rules,' for example, setting up the equipment for a week
- Everyone agrees to abide by the rules and to accept the penalty for breaking one
- The players and coach all sign the contract and a copy is kept by the coach or put on the wall in the changing room or sports hall.
- All that remains is for the squad to enforce the penalties when a rule is broken

When working with much younger children it is difficult to have a rational discussion about codes of conduct. Rather it is more often the case of a coach 'laying down the law' in terms of what is not allowed, for example no running around, no shouting and no fighting. The coach must carry out some sort of penalty if rules are broken. It is vitally important that you are fair and consistent in delivering your punishment. You cannot punish one child for running around and then not punish another child for doing the same thing. Similarly you cannot penalise children for fighting one day and then let it go the next, this will cause confusion.

You should always provide the children with a reason for your behaviour. If they understand why they are not allowed to run around then they are less likely to do it. Your reasons should be as clear and simple as possible, for example explaining that if everyone is running around someone could fall and get hurt. You could introduce these rules by referring back to the simple games that you played in the previous section. In those games there were rules so that everyone knew what they could and couldn't do. In the same way there are rules in your classes so that everyone knows what to do.



3.5 Self-awareness

The key to the success of any mental training programme is the athlete's level of self-awareness. Many badminton players can walk off the court after a game, and provide their coach with a list of tactical and technical achievements and errors that they made. However, not many players are aware of how they performed mentally, and most probably do not give it a second thought, they are too concerned with how to remedy their technical mistakes.

If an athlete is not aware of his/her emotional/mental state then it is impossible to gain control over it. To work towards achieving an ideal performance state players must first have an idea of what that ideal state actually is. For example do they play best when relaxed or pumped up? Exactly how relaxed do they need to be? Can they recognise this level of arousal, and can they tell when they are too relaxed or too nervous?

Players are often hyper aware of their physical state. They can easily tell you when they feel tired. A small blister on the foot is a constant irritation, and they can feel the impact of the beginnings of a cold on their performance. If a player is to really benefit from mental training then they need to develop this same level of awareness of their mental state. They should be able to describe what thought was going through their head when they made that series of unforced errors in the second game. They should be able to tell you how they felt during the knock out before the English Nationals final.

If a player is going to achieve this level of self-awareness it is vital that they get in to the habit from an early age. For this reason it is suggested that children as young as six years old start to learn the basics of self-awareness.

Practical Exercise

During this stage, the aim is merely to begin to get the children to notice and label their thoughts and feelings e.g. 'I feel scared', 'I feel happy' etc. Children aged between 6 and 9 years will often know how they feel, but are likely to experience difficulty putting these thoughts and feelings into words.

A simple way to resolve this problem is to use pictures. Create a set of pictures that represent different emotional expressions e.g. happy, scared, angry, bored, worried, puzzled etc. These pictures can be as basic as the traditional smiley face as shown below.

Illustration Needed

Ask each child to select a card that represents how they feel. This can be done for example at the start and end of a training session. When using this technique with the older children (8-9 years) you can encourage them to talk a little about why they selected that particular card.

SECTION 4

Learning to Play (Males 9-12, Females 8-11)

At this stage players are introduced to structured mental training for the first time. The aim is to introduce players to the basic skills of relaxation, confidence, concentration and motivation. As in the previous stage, coaches should attempt to keep this fun and should introduce mental training as a natural part of training that is just as important as physical and technical practice.

4.1 Learning to Imagine

Young children are good at imagery, enjoy imaging, and spend a great deal of time imagining all sorts of fantastical events, people and worlds. As they get older parents, teachers and coaches who constantly tell them to 'pay attention' and 'stop day dreaming' stamp this tendency out of them. In stopping this activity, we are actually throwing away a very useful psychological technique, one that enables the player to programme the mind and body to behave in a desired way. As adults we often find that we have lost this basic skill, and when we come to try and imagine ourselves executing that perfect shot, or winning that vital match, we find that we are unable to do so.

Imagery involves using all the senses to create or re-create an experience in the mind. It is an extremely valuable and versatile technique. It can be used to build confidence, to increase motivation, to aid concentration, and produce relaxation. It can be used to identify technical errors and to learn new skills. It is an important supplement to physical practice and can be used as an alternative to physical practice for injured athletes who are unable to get out on the court.

Practical Exercise

Think about the drills that you have been doing with your players in training. Select a particular drill or shot that you have taught them, and write a short script that describes in simple language, how you would perform the shot. This is what you are going to ask the players to imagine. At the end of a training session, ask all the players to sit with their eyes shut, and get them to imagine themselves performing the shot that you have selected. Use the script that you have written to guide them through the imagery e.g. I want you to see yourself moving quickly towards the net etc.

PROMOTE THE CONCEPT

Very young children are happy to engage in imagery and do so all the time, however as they get older, players may take a little more convincing. When introducing an imagery programme to players in this stage it is vital that you promote the concept so that they are willing to give it a try. You can do this in several different ways:

- It is important to explain to them what imagery actually is, i.e. creating or recreating images in the mind.
- Emphasise the impact that imagery training can have on performance. For example imagery can be used to develop each of the four key psychological skills discussed in section one.

- Explain that many top athletes such as for example Nathan Roberson and Gail Emms, regularly use imagery.
- Provide a practical demonstration that actually shows the effect that imagery can have on the body.

Practical Exercise

Divide players into pairs. One member of each pair is the observer, and the other person is the worker. Ask the worker to stand up and close their eyes. Next ask him/her to imagine that they are falling backwards. Ask the observer to watch what happens. What should happen is that the worker will begin to move slightly backwards (ensure that the area around them is clear). Have the pairs swap over so that both players get the chance to complete the exercise.

Now that you have demonstrated the effect that it can have on the body it is time to explain how imagery works. There are two basic explanations for how imagery enhances performance. One suggestion is that when you execute a movement, your brain has to create a mental blueprint to tell your muscles what to do. Every time you practice the skill you strengthen the blueprint, and so the skill improves. When you imagine a skill, your brain also creates the appropriate mental blueprint, and so using imagery helps the brain to develop the correct movement pattern and sequence.

The second explanation concerns the notion of muscle memory. Obviously when you make a particular movement, for example moving to the back of the court to play a smash, all the muscles that are involved in that particular movement are activated. According to this explanation the exact same thing happens when you imagine executing the movement, it is just that the amount of activation is so much lower that the movement is barely visible (think back to the practical exercise, this is what happened). According to this explanation imagery works by training the muscles to perform the correct action, a little like completing extra training.

When explaining this to the players you need to keep it simple and use terms that they will understand. Perhaps the easiest way to explain it would be to suggest that imagery allows them to practice their skills without actually having to get up on court and do them. This is not a substitute to on-court training, it should compliment and support physical training.

Before you begin any actual imagery training, it is useful to assess your athletes' imagery ability. In the same way that athletes differ in their ability to complete physical skills, so they will differ in their imagery ability. It is important to know the range of imagery abilities so that you can decide how to pitch your training.

Practical Exercise

To evaluate your athletes' imagery ability ask them to complete the following simple exercise:

- Select a simple skill such as the short serve, and ask the athletes to close their eyes and try to imagine themselves successfully completing the skill
- Once players have done this, ask them how easy it was to gain a picture of the image? How easy it was to control what happened in the image? If they find this easy then you can ask them to imagine something more complex for example bring in the idea of an opponent who returns the serve, and the player must respond to the return.

Once you have completed these simple stages you are ready to begin basic imagery training with your players. At the 'Learning to Play' stage your imagery training should focus upon two key aspects, vividness and control. These two key skills are the foundations for the imagery training that will take place in the 'Training to Train' stage.

The more vivid and realistic an image is the more effective the imagery will be. However, it is vital that a player has control over their imagery. Remember that when engaging in imagery training you are teaching the brain and the muscles to remember specific movement patterns almost as if you were physically practising them. We all know the saying 'practice makes perfect.' This is fine if what you are practising is correct, but if you are practising the wrong thing then it is likely that you will become perfect at the wrong thing. It is therefore vital that the player has complete control of what happens in the image.

4.2 Learning to thought stop

Sometimes things go wrong in a game of badminton. A player makes an unforced error, an almost perfect shot slides down the wrong side of the net or lands a millimetre wide, perhaps the line judge makes an unfair call or the serve judge questions the legality of a player's serve. In these situations it can often be difficult to forget what has happened and get on with the game. Many players experience negative thoughts dwelling on that unfair line call or worrying about why their smash isn't working.

If you are worrying about all the bad things that have happened or could still happen it means that your mind is not where it should be i.e. on the game. Not only do these thoughts disrupt concentration and therefore ruin performance, but they can also have a negative effect on a player's confidence. You worry about playing badly and so you forget to focus on the right things, and because of this you play badly, which then makes you worry even more, and so you play worse and so on. This exact situation is what sport psychologists call the negative spiral of performance, and it can be very difficult to break out of this spiral once you are in it.

Practical Exercises

VIVIDNESS

- Ask players to, "close their eyes, and take a few moments to relax" using one of the breathing techniques discussed in the 'Learning to breathe to control nerves' section.
- Once everyone appears reasonably relaxed and focused, ask each player to try to visualise their own racket as if they were holding it out in front of them.
- Ask them to, "notice the size, shape and colour of the racket. Notice the colour of the grip, any writing on the frame or the strings, the shape of the racket head."
- Once everyone has had chance to do this (allow them a few minutes) ask them to, "imagine how the racket feels in their hands. How heavy is the racket? What does the grip feel like? Is it cold or warm? Is it dry or slippery? How tightly are they gripping the racket?"
- Again once all players have had a chance to try this, move on to the final stage. This time ask the players to imagine that they are swinging the racket backwards and forwards in front of them. Ask them to imagine how the speed at which the racket is moving. Have them try to imagine feeling the muscles in their arms and shoulders working as they move the racket.
- This exercise should be practiced 3-4 times per week until the athletes are reasonably competent at imagining the sensations and making the images realistic.

CONTROL

Once the athletes are reasonably proficient at the vividness exercise, you can introduce the control exercise.

- Select a simple skill that you would like the player to work on for example a particular shot, or a specific movement pattern. Aim to keep this simple so take it out of a game situation, for example they might just imagine themselves moving forward from their base to play a backhand net shot.

It might be that you identify different shots for different players or you might decide to have all players work on the same shot.

- Imagine themselves successfully completing the shot according to your exact instructions as to how the shot should be played (you will need to give them some guidance).
- Imagine this 10 times in a row, each time completing the exact same shot. If at anytime they see themselves making a mistake with the shot they should go back and start again.
- Once the player is competent at imaging that skill, you can move on to a different shot or movement pattern.
- If any of the players has difficulty completing this exercise then it can be helpful to first have them physically practice the shot, and then immediately try to imagine completing it successfully. Alternatively you could demonstrate the shot and then ask them to imagine themselves completing the shot.
- This exercise should be practiced 3-4 times per week until players are competent at the exercise. Once they are competent at this exercise you can combine the vividness and control practice by asking each player to try to imagine the feeling of gripping the racket as they play the shot, the feeling of moving their muscles as they make the shot, the view of the racket in their hand, the shuttle and the court as they play the shot.

The key to avoiding the negative spiral (or breaking out of it) is to gain control of your thoughts. At the 'Learning to Play' stage you should introduce your players to a very simple yet very effective technique known as thought-stopping.

Simple thought-stopping involves three stages

- Make players aware that they are experiencing negative thoughts.
- Teach them how to interrupt these thoughts
- Show them how to replace the negative thought with a positive thought.

This may sound complicated, but all you really have to remember is these three words:

SPOT STOP SWAP

Practical Exercises

SPOT

- Ask your players to make a list of all the bad thoughts that they have when playing a game of badminton, for example, "they might think I'm stupid", or "I can't do that shot." List of 'bad thoughts.'
- Give everyone a copy of the list of his/her bad thoughts so that they can become familiar with the types of thoughts that we are talking about.

STOP

Now that your players know which thoughts to look out for, they need to know how to stop one of these thoughts if they pop into their heads during a game. In order to do this each player needs what is called a 'trigger' to interrupt the thought. It is best at this stage if the trigger is a physical action such as snapping the finger, tightening shoelaces or pulling up socks. Ideally the trigger will be something that can realistically be done on the court during a game, although when first learning the technique it does not have to be.

Once you have explained about triggers you need to get your players to each choose the trigger that they want to use. They do not all have to use the same trigger. Have them practice using the trigger by first selecting one of the bad thoughts from your list and asking them all to focus on that thought, and then immediately use their trigger to take their attention away from the thought.

To gain further practice with this they should be encouraged to use their trigger whenever they are having a thought that they should not be having. We have talked so far about negative thoughts, but you could also include irrelevant thoughts, for example if they are day dreaming about what they are going to be doing at the weekend whilst you are explaining a training drill, then they should practice interrupting that irrelevant thought with their trigger. They can do the same at school.

The key point here is to get used to using the trigger, and to use it every time.

SWAP

Merely stopping the negative thought is not enough. If you do not replace the thought straight away then it is very likely that it will just come straight back. In order to be prepared for this you must decide in advance what thought you are going to use to replace the negative thought that you have stopped. This replacement thought should either be something positive e.g.. I can do it, or something relevant to the task e.g. 'push' (for a short serve) or 'speed'. Rather than long sentences these replacement thoughts should only be one or two key words that are easy to remember.

For the purpose of learning the technique you could select a general thought for your players such as 'next point.' Work with your players to select a replacement thought that they can use.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Once all three parts of the technique are in place all that remains is to put it all together. Set up some practice games and drills and tell your players to use their thought-stopping strategy during the game.

Before you start the game talk through the process with your players to make sure that they remember what they have to do.

- Ask them to tell you the names of the three stages (SPOT, STOP, SWAP).
- Ask them to tell you the bad thoughts that they have to stop.
- Ask them what they do when they have a bad thought (e.g. take a deep breath, pull up socks, tighten shoe laces etc)
- Ask them what they are going to think after they have used their trigger (e.g. next point).

Once you are sure that they are ready and know what they are doing let them try the practice game. They should be encouraged to use the thought-stopping technique whenever they have 'bad' thoughts. Once they are comfortable with the technique you can also include irrelevant thoughts. If you want to take the technique a step further with the older children then you can identify different triggers and different replacement thoughts for different situations. However, be careful not to overload players with too many different things to remember. Keeping it simple is often much more effective!



4.3 Learning to set goals (SMARTER)

Almost every athlete has a goal that they want to achieve. Some of these are very specific such as 'to win an Olympic gold medal,' others are more vague such as 'to be the best player that I can be'. If you asked each of your players what their goal for their badminton is chances are most of them will be able to tell you. Yet despite this natural interest in setting goals, very few players and coaches know how to set goals effectively.

It is good for players to have goals, and you should encourage your players to identify them even at this relatively young age. Having goals or targets to aim for can really help to motivate a player and it can help them stay motivated when they suffer set backs, feel as though they are not progressing or are just plain fed up of training.

Having a target to aim for gives a direction and purpose to training and competition. It helps to keep you on course. It makes sense to figure out where you are going and how you are going to get there. If you don't have any kind of plan how will you know if you are progressing well or if you need to make any changes? For example if you set off on a car journey with only a vague idea of where you are going and no plan of what route you are going to take then the chances are that you will waste a great deal of time and may not ever make it to your destination. In contrast if you have a specific route planned out, you will always be able to measure your progress, you can make adjustments to your speed if necessary, and you should reach your destination in good time. A badminton player without a proper goal-setting programme is like a car driver without a map, getting lost and going round in circles with no idea of how to get to that final destination.

Practical Exercise

- Put the players into pairs and have them hit the shuttle backwards and forwards between them for a few minutes. Do not provide any instructions, just leave them doing this for a while, and notice how focused and engaged in the task they are.
- After about five minutes stop them and tell that they are going to do the same thing but this time they are going to count how many hits they make without the shuttle hitting the floor or the net. Give them a target that they should try and reach, for example they have to try to complete for example 30 continuous hits before the time is up. Every time the shuttle touches the floor or the net they have to go right back to zero and start counting again.
- Let them do this for five minutes and notice how focused on the task they are now. You should find that when they have a specific target to aim for they become much more focused and motivated. They may even want to have another go to see if they can beat their original score!

SMARTER GOAL-SETTING

For goals to be effective they must be SMARTER

Specific
Measurable
Achievable
Realistic
Time based
Evaluated
Recorded

Goals need to be **specific** and **measurable**, as it is important for athletes to know whether or not they have successfully met their goals. Goals must be set so that they are challenging but not impossible (in other words they must be **achievable and realistic**), otherwise athletes will meet them too easily, which can lead to boredom or not meet them at all, which can lead to frustration and demotivation. Goals must have a **time** frame (i.e. a point at which they will be evaluated). Having a deadline, reminds athletes that their goals are current concerns and that there is an urgency to meet them. Provision must be made for goals to be **evaluated**, as players need to receive feedback on their progress. Finally goals should be written down (**recorded**) so that they can be easily referred to and will not be forgotten.

Practical Exercise

Ask your athletes to go back to the three goals that they set in the previous exercise (one outcome, one performance, and one process). Talk through the SMARTER principles with them (as explained above) and have them go back and make each of their goals SMARTER goals. You will need to go around and check to make sure that their goals meet all of the criteria. You could do this in a group e.g. have each player read out their goal, and as you call off each of the criteria (Specific, Measurable etc) ask the players to decide whether or not the goal actually meets the criteria. If a goal does not meet one of the criteria have the players figure out what changes need to be made to the goal so that it does meet all the criteria. Have each of the players write down their new **SMARTER** goals.

4.4 Learning to breathe to control nerves

The secret to relaxation is correct breathing. When we get scared and anxious our breathing becomes very fast and shallow. This can cause muscle tension, a rapid heart rate, and increased feelings of anxiety. By switching to a relaxed pattern of breathing you can relax your muscles, and slow down your heart rate. This stops the brain experiencing the panic signals that cause anxiety.

THE BREATHING CYCLE

Phases

- 1) **Inhalation** (*breathing in*)
- 2) **Exhalation** (*breathing out*)

The **inhalation phase** (breathing in) is the tension-producing phase. This phase can be used to increase alertness and motivation.

The **exhalation phase** (breathing out) is the relaxation phase. When attempting to relax the focus should be on the breathing out part of the cycle. Breathing should be slow and easy without too much conscious effort.

Practical Exercises

There are many simple exercises that can be practiced to gain control of breathing and to aid relaxation. These should be practiced several times a week until the players are proficient. Do not ask the players to work on all of these exercises at once. Begin with simply counting breaths, and then move on to ratio breathing. Only when ratio breathing has been mastered should you move on to the exhalation exercise. Once the players are reasonably competent at the exhalation exercise, move on to the one-breath technique. Be aware that the one-breath technique can be a difficult technique to master, but it is well worth persevering.

4.4.1 Counting breaths

This is a very simple but effective exercise that helps a player to gain control of his/her breathing.

1. Breathe normally and observe the breathing cycle passively. Let your body breathe by itself.
2. Start to focus on the exhalations (breathing out).
3. Count each time you breathe out until you have counted 10 breaths.

4.4.2 Ratio breathing

This is another simple technique that teaches you how to slow down breathing, which is vital for relaxation.

1. Breathe normally and observe the breathing cycle passively. Let your body breathe by itself.
2. Breathe in to a slow count of 2.
3. Hold that breath for a count of 2
4. Release the breath to a count of 4
5. Repeat this process for 10 breaths

It doesn't matter which numbers you use (but don't hold your breath for too long!) All that matters is that you take a longer time to breathe out than you do to breathe in.

4.4.3 The exhalation exercise

This exercise will help to make sure that the exhalation phase (breathing out) of the breathing cycle becomes the cue for relaxation.

1. Close your eyes, and breathe normally for 4 breaths. As you breathe focus on the air as it enters and leaves your nose.
2. For the next 4 breaths focus only on the exhalation phase (breathing out). As you focus on breathing out focus on the warmth of the air as it leaves your nose.
3. For the next 4 breaths continue to focus on the exhalations, but feel yourself relax each time you breathe out. Feel your breathing slowing down, feel your heart beat slowing down, feel yourself sinking in to the chair.
4. Continue to focus on the exhalations for 4 more breaths. Feel yourself relaxing and letting go.
5. Remain in the relaxed state for a few moments. When ready open your eyes, take a deep breath in and stretch to wake yourself up.

4.4.4 The one-breath technique

The idea of this exercise is that you do what you have been doing with the ratio breathing, but you only do it for one breath (not 10 breaths). This will help you to relax quickly.

1. **Inhalation:** Breathe in and try to fill your lungs with as much air as possible. Do this to a count of 1.
2. **Containment:** Hold your breath for a count of 4. Breath holding is an important part of all breathing control exercises. If breath is held in the lungs a little longer than usual (not too long!), more time is allowed for the vital process of getting rid of carbon dioxide and taking in oxygen.
3. **Exhalation:** Use the same technique that you used in the 'exhalation exercise'. Focus on breathing out and letting go of tension. It might help to imagine that you are like a balloon deflating. Breathe out to a count of 2.

(These exercises are based upon exercises described in J.M. Williams (Ed) (2001). Applied Sport Psychology: Personal growth to peak performance. Chapter 15 pp229-246).

4.5 Basic Progressive Muscular Relaxation (PMR)

Progressive muscular relaxation (PMR) was first devised by Jacobson in 1932, and today is one of the most popular techniques used by sport psychologists to help athletes cope with pressure and anxiety. The ultimate aim of PMR is to enable an athlete to gain control over the levels of tension in each of the major muscle groups in the body. A PMR programme evolves through various stages, and upon reaching the final stage, a player should be able to relax muscles instantly to the appropriate level merely by recognising that there is unwanted tension in the muscle.

The technique works by first teaching the player to recognise the feelings of tension and relaxation in the body. Once they are aware of these feelings it is possible to pair the feelings together in such a way that relaxation becomes an automatic response to the recognition that there is unwanted tension. Obviously to achieve such control takes considerable time and practice, and is something that they will work on in later stages. At the 'Learning to Play' stage the aim is simply to introduce the first phase of PMR, which enables the athlete to begin to recognise the feelings of tension and relaxation.

Practical Exercise

CLENCHED FIST

To gain an understanding of the negative effect of too much tension upon performance, ask each player to clench his/her fist as tightly as possible and to hold this position for 10 seconds. If they are really clenching their fists tightly they should notice that this tension actually makes the muscles in their arms shake. Explain that this is what happens to our muscles when we are too anxious. Too much muscle tension makes movement slow and uncoordinated. To demonstrate this effect, ask them to try and perform a precise short serve whilst gripping the racket as tightly as possible. Once they have done this, ask them to loosen their grip and try the serve again. They should notice an improvement in the fluidity and accuracy when the shot is performed under relaxed conditions.

BASIC PMR

Basic PMR is a deep relaxation technique that should leave players feeling very relaxed. For this reason it should **NOT** be done immediately prior to competition or training because players will be more relaxed than is appropriate. It is important that you make this clear to the players. This basic phase is used as a starting point to lead onto more momentary relaxation that can be carried out on the court. However, it can also be used as a technique in its own right to aid relaxation and sleep following a training session or the night before a competition.

In terms of introducing the technique to players it would be ideal if you worked through PMR with them at the end of training sessions perhaps three times per week for three weeks. Once players are proficient at this technique they should be able to do it without any guidance from you and should be encouraged to complete PMR in their own time.

This exercise will require a reasonably large floor space (depending upon the number of players), and ideally a gym mat for each player. It should take place in a room that is quiet and has a comfortable temperature.

- Ask each of the athletes lie flat on their backs on a mat. They should be spaced out so that they are not likely to accidentally kick each other.
- They should lie flat with their arms by their sides (not behind their heads) and their legs out in front of them (not crossed).
- Before starting the exercise check to make sure that none of the players are carrying injuries. If someone is injured ensure that they do not complete the tense and relax sequence for the muscles that are injured.
- Once everyone is settled ask the athletes to close their eyes and begin to focus on their breathing.
- Take slow deep breaths and to focus on exhaling. (They should find this easy once they have mastered the breathing exercises discussed in the previous section). Allow them approximately two minutes to do this.
- Continue to breathe slowly and deeply whilst listening to your instructions. Explain that you are going to work through all of the major muscle groups first asking them to notice any existing tension, next asking them to tense the muscles and hold that tension, and finally they will be told to release the tension.

They are only to tense the muscles when you tell them to **TENSE**, and must hold the tension until you tell them to **RELAX**. At all times they should continue with their slow deep breathing and should not hold their breath. Explain that you will be starting with the face and working down the body.

You should work on the following muscle groups in the following order:

Face
Shoulders and neck
Arms
Stomach
Legs

For example you would begin by telling them to notice any tension that they currently feel in the muscles in their face. Ask them to focus on this tension for a moment and explain that when you tell them to tense the muscles they should screw up their faces as tightly as possible. Then tell them to **TENSE** the muscles in their faces. Keep them in this position for about 10 seconds and during this time encourage them to focus on the feelings of tension. After 10 seconds tell them to **RELAX**. Allow them to enjoy the feelings of relaxation for about 10-20 seconds, and encourage them to focus on these feelings of relaxation. Remind them to take slow deep breaths, and with each breath tell them to imagine that they are sinking further and further in to the floor, and feeling more and more relaxed. Once you have done this move on to the next muscle group, shoulders and neck, and repeat the process.

During the relax phase of the shoulders and neck stage encourage them to notice the feelings of relaxation in their shoulders, neck and face. Continue this for each stage for example during the relax phase of arms ask them to notice the feelings of relaxation in their arms, shoulders, neck and face and so on. Once you have completed all the muscle groups tell them to notice how relaxed their entire body feels. Allow them several minutes to enjoy these feelings of relaxation, and then explain that you are going to slowly bring them out of a relaxed state. Do this by asking them to slowly begin to stretch and move. Once they are ready ask them to open their eyes and sit up.

HOW TO MAXIMISE THE TENSION

To maximise tension in the shoulders and neck the athletes should try to hunch their shoulders up to their ears.

To maximise the tension in their arms they should raise both arms off the floor (so that they are parallel to the floor) and clench both fists as tightly as possible.

To maximise the tension in their stomachs they should try to suck their stomachs in as tightly as possible.

To maximise the tension in their legs they should keep both legs straight, and point their toes towards their heads.

It will help you if you prepare a script (See Appendix I) that you can read from to lead them through the exercise. Begin with the section on breathing and then the explanation. Once this has been done work through each of the major muscle groups first noticing the tension, then telling them how to maximise the tension. Next ask them to **TENSE** the muscle and notice the tension, then ask them to **RELAX** and notice the relaxation.

Remember to remind them to continue with the slow deep breaths and to feel themselves sinking in to the floor and becoming more and more relaxed. Remember to allow them some time at the end to come out of the relaxed state.

You should try to speak slowly and reasonably softly (although loud enough so that you can be easily heard).

SECTION 5

Training to Train (Males 12-16, Females 11-15)

The aim of this stage is to introduce players to more advanced forms of mental training. Building upon the foundational skills introduced in 'FUNdamentals' and 'Learning to Play', this stage will focus in particular upon advancing the psychological techniques of psychological profiling, goal-setting, self-talk, imagery and thought-stopping. It will also introduce game focus plans/pre-performance routines, the importance of effective match preparation and concentration

5.1 Psychological Profiling

Performance profiling is a way for a player, coach and sports psychologist to begin a discussion of performance strengths and weaknesses. The purpose of profiling is to identify which skills the player feels would be useful to develop. Performance profiling makes a player think more about his/her performance. A simple way of profiling is to discuss with the player what sort of skills and attributes are displayed by highly successful participants in their sport. These skills and attributes can be physical and technical as well as psychological. These attributes will provide the 'ideal' against which the player's own current performance can be evaluated.

Exercise One

Ask players to think of a successful badminton performer. As a group, they must generate a list of skills and attributes that person possesses. These attributes could be technical (e.g. A consistent low serve), physical (e.g. Agility) or mental (e.g. Calm under pressure) or ideally a combination of all three. Give each player a copy of the performance profile wheel (illustrated below). Once the attributes have been identified they can be inserted into the outer ring of the circle. Ask the players to consider their own ability on each of the attributes. Players should score themselves out of 10 for each attribute (10 being very good and 0 being very poor). They can then enter the score on the performance profile wheel in the appropriate section.

The completed wheel will provide a visual display of current strengths and weaknesses and can be used as a starting point for the generation of training goals. The athlete can repeat the process in 3-6 months (or whatever time frame you feel is appropriate) in order to monitor and record improvements.

5.2 Goal-Setting (Types of goals)

Setting effective goals has been shown to have beneficial effects upon performance and also to lead to positive changes in psychological states such as anxiety, confidence, concentration and motivation. However, goals must be set properly; otherwise they could have the reverse effect to that which is desired. At this stage players need to be aware of the types of goals that they should be setting, and how to set these goals effectively.

TYPES OF GOALS

You need to introduce your players to the idea of setting goals or targets that they want to achieve. You could begin by asking them what they want to achieve from their badminton, where they want to get to by the end of their career. This is what is known as a **long-term** goal. It might help if you call this their big goal.

Long-term goals can be something that an athlete wants to achieve by the end of the season but more often they are things that the athlete wants to achieve several years down the line. It is good to have this ultimate aim, this one overall purpose to aim for, and your athletes should at least have an idea of why they are playing badminton, what they hope to achieve from it.

Some very motivated and disciplined athletes may only need one distant objective to keep them going. However such athletes are very rare, and it is unlikely that the fantasy of standing on the medal rostrum at the 2012 Olympics will be enough to motivate a young player to put in the required practice day after day, and to keep going when they are struggling to master a shot or failing to win games.

For this reason we also encourage athletes to set **medium-term** goals. These are goals that will help us to achieve that ultimate long-term goal. These are goals that we will aim to achieve within a few months or years. For example if your ultimate goal is eight years away then the medium term goals are things that must be achieved within those eight years. It is likely that there could be a reasonably large number of medium-term goals.

It helps to explain this to your players by using the example of a staircase. If you imagine a long staircase, and the top step of the staircase is the ultimate goal e.g. the Olympic gold medal, the other steps in the staircase are all the goals that would need to be achieved in order to get to that gold medal. For example in order to get to the Olympics you would need to be selected for the Olympic team, so that would be a medium-term goal. In order to be selected for the Olympic team you would need to have reached a certain level in the English National rankings or win the English Nationals. You could perhaps draw this out as an example to show your players.

Practical Exercise

- Draw out a staircase for each of your players (three steps)
- Ask them to write their long-term (big) goal on the top step.
- Ask them to think of one medium-term goal that they think that they will need to achieve in order to reach the top step (ultimate goal). You may have to help them to do this. At this stage it does not matter if the goals are not strictly accurate what we are going for is teaching the players the idea of setting a series of targets that link together. Have them write this medium goal on the middle step.
- The bottom step is a short-term goal (small), in other words something that they will be able to do within the next few weeks and months that will help them to achieve the middle goal. For example a short-term goal might be to master a particular shot or to learn a new footwork pattern. Again once you have helped the players to identify a short-term goal have them write it on the bottom step.
- It may help to use a shorter time frame for this exercise for example set your long-term goal as something that they can do at the end of the season, the medium-term goal as something that they can do halfway through the season, and the short-term goal as something that they can do within a month. At this stage all that matters is that they understand what goals are and they know that to get to your long-term goal (big) there are medium goals that you must achieve, and to get to the medium goals there are small goals.

TYPES OF GOALS

Having discussed long-term, medium-term and short-term goals, it is now time to introduce your players to outcome, performance, and process goals.

Outcome goals, as the name suggests are goals that are related to the outcome of an event. Winning a gold medal or gaining selection for a particular team are both examples of outcome goals. Sport is obviously highly outcome orientated. Medals, selection, and ranking points are vital, and therefore it is not surprising that the majority of coaches and players set outcome goals. It is fine to set some outcome goals, indeed as a player it would be impossible not to, however, players should be encouraged to set other types of goals too. The problem with only setting outcome goals is that the athlete only ever has partial control of the outcome, other people such as the opponent the line judges and umpire can also affect the result. You could play the best badminton of your life and still not win the match simply because your opponent played better. Outcome goals also tend to be less flexible than performance and process goals.

Performance goals such as increasing serving accuracy, or increasing aerobic fitness are goals that are under the performer's control. These are goals that are related to the individual player's performance and do not involve comparison to other players.

Finally **Process goals** focus on techniques that players need to master in order to improve performance. An example of a process goal might be to learn the correct racket head angle for a reverse slice shot, or mastering the appropriate footwork pattern for a net shot. Like performance goals, these are relatively flexible targets that are under the control of the individual player, and do not involve comparison with others.

Practical Exercise

Using the above explanation and examples, talk to your athletes about the three different types of goals.

- Ask each of players to set one outcome goal, one performance goal and one process goal.

Research has suggested that the most successful athletes tend to set a combination of outcome, performance and process goals. However, you should avoid setting too many goals, particularly when an athlete is first learning to set goals. Often players set outcome goals that tend to be more long-term goals for example to win a particular grand slam or to gain selection for a particular squad, and then set performance and process goals that will help them to reach that outcome goal. It may be useful at this stage to limit your players to one outcome goal, and have them set say three performance goals and three process goals that will help them to achieve that outcome.

TRAINING AND COMPETITION GOALS

As a coach you probably set goals for specific training sessions, you know what the purpose of each session is. You probably also have an idea of the competition targets that you would like each player to achieve. It is important that they also learn to set goals for both training and competition. Most will have competition goals, which tend to be outcome goals such as for example a top four finish. Training goals are more often performance and process goals, and it is important to remind your players that they should set these goals because it helps them to maintain their motivation for training.

POSITIVE NOT NEGATIVE GOALS

It is vital that all goals are phrased positively and not negatively. For example you should encourage your players to set goals to increase the accuracy of their shots rather than to decrease the number of mistakes. In this way players are focused upon achieving success rather than trying to avoid failure.

ACTION PLANS

Often goals are set effectively, but are not achieved, because no plan has been put in place for achieving them. Players and coaches often mistakenly believe that merely setting the goal is enough to make it happen. Unfortunately, goals are not achieved by magic; they are achieved by systematic and appropriate strategies. For example a player who has set the short term goal of increasing the accuracy of their low serve, measured by the percentage of serves landing at a certain point may incorporate the strategy of performing 20 low serves at the end of each training session.

Practical Exercise

- Using the explanation above, introduce your players to the idea of actions plans to achieve goals.
- Have each player work out an action plan to achieve their process goal.
- As before make sure that each player writes down his or her action plan, and keep a record of each plan yourself.
- You should then try to help the players to put their plans in to practice during the next few training sessions.
- Remember to check to see if the players actually achieve their process goals.
- Appendix II may be used during this exercise

5.3 Self-talk

Anytime you talk or think to yourself, you are using self-talk. Self-talk is an asset when it is positive, but when negative, it quickly becomes a liability. Often when performance is going really well, athletes are so immersed in the moment that they report no thoughts at all. However, this is very rare and more often players are actively thinking prior to, during and after performance. To be successful, individuals need to be able to screen out negative thoughts and instead focus their minds on positive/constructive thoughts.

The first step in gaining control of self-talk is to become aware of it. Often players do not realise just how many negative thoughts they are having and have no idea what triggers these thoughts or what impact they have on performance. By asking players to begin to monitor their thoughts, they can start to recognise which thoughts need to be screened out, as well as when they are likely to occur.

Exercise

- Straight after a training drill or short practice match (e.g. up to 7 points) ask players to jot down all the thoughts they had.
- Players must then go through each of the thoughts and decide whether they are positive, negative or neutral.
- An alternative would be to have players start with a number of paper clips in the right hand pocket of their shorts. Every time they have a negative thought they must transfer a paper clip to the left hand pocket. At the end of the drill/practice game they should count the number of paper clips in the left pocket to see how many negative thoughts they had.

Once players are aware that they are having negative thoughts, they need to try to identify which situations elicit these thoughts e.g. Do the negative thoughts start the day before competition? Do the negative thoughts start after an error? Knowing the 'danger' situations will help the player to be ready to combat the negative thoughts when they arise.

5.4 Imagery for Training and Competition

Through imagery we can create and recreate experiences. Using imagery we can learn new skills, practice old ones, evaluate past performances, recall outstanding performances and achieve relaxation. From the 'Learning to Play Phase' your players should have already encountered the basics of imagery training. At this stage the aim is to build on these foundational skills to allow for more complex and varied uses of imagery. Imagery can be used as an important part of your training programme. You can use it in the following ways:

TRAINING SKILLS

1) To practice skills

We know that use of imagery can improve performance of physical skills. When people image, similar impulses occur in the brain and muscles to those impulses that occur during actual physical performance. In addition imaging helps the brain to lay down a mental blueprint/plan for the movements. As such it is almost as if we are actually doing the physical practice, even though we may just be sitting in an armchair. For these reasons, imagery is an excellent adjunct to physical training and is particularly useful for those players who are injured and cannot do physical training.

2) To learn new skills

We know that imagery can be used successfully to learn new skills. Remember that imagery is not just about re-creating past experiences; there is also the opportunity to create images of situations/events that have not yet taken place. You can get players to image new shots/patterns that you are trying to teach to them. Using imagery players can slow down movements, like a slow motion video, in order to really understand the sequence of movements they are trying to learn.

3) New Skills

Remember that imagery is not just about re-creating images of what has happened in the past, it is also about creating new experiences. As such, you can also use imagery to help your players develop new skills, as well as practice previously learned ones. In dove-tailing imagery with your coaching drills, first you would demonstrate/describe a shot or movement pattern as normal. You would then get the players to image the shot/movement pattern, before they perform it.

COMPETITION SKILLS

1) To evaluate performance/correct mistakes

By replaying experiences in the mind, players can look back at performances and evaluate where they went right or wrong. They can also examine the performances of other players to pick out opponents' playing styles/patterns.

2) Build confidence and aid relaxation and concentration

By imagining positive performance scenarios (either ones that have actually happened or ones hoped to happen), players can gain a quick confidence boost. Imagining past successful performances can be particularly useful for players in a performance slump. Calm, soothing images can be helpful for those players who suffer from competition nerves and imagery can also be incorporated into a pre-performance routine in order to aid focus.

3) Tactics

Once players can competently image different shots and shot patterns they can use imagery to help develop their tactical awareness and to evaluate performance. Players can be directed towards imaging recent performances in order to pick out key patterns used by opponents. They can also evaluate their own responses to opponents' shots and can image alternative (successful) responses that can then be taken into the training environment.

POLYSENSORY IMAGERY

When we experience events in real life, we do so with all of our senses (e.g. We see our opponent opposite us, we hear the noise of the crowd, we smell the scent of the sports hall, we feel the racket in our hands, we sense the movement of our muscles as we stretch to play a shot and we experience happiness when we succeed). When we create or recreate an image we should try to use as many senses as possible, because this will make the images more vivid and life-like. The more vivid the image, the more effective it will be. Your players have already been introduced to some basic Vividness (polysensory) exercises, but now they need to be able to image more game-like situations.

Exercise One (vividness)

To help your athletes produce vivid images, it is best to start by guiding them through an imagery exercise. This will involve you telling players exactly what you want them to image. Rather than asking them to image a whole game, it is best to start with a simple rally (two to three shots). Write down what you think the player should see, hear, feel and smell as they play these shots. Try to include as many of the senses as you can and make the descriptions as accurate as possible. Different scripts can be written to take players through a range of different shot patterns. Go at the pace of your players. Once players become more adept at imaging, you can build up the complexity of the image to longer rallies and then a series of rallies and then to key rallies from particular games.

If players are struggling to achieve a vivid image, it is often useful to get them to play the rally first and then imagine playing it. Those who are really struggling should go back to imaging just one shot at a time, until they feel confident. It is important that imagery is always positive and correct; therefore your script should guide the players into imaging correct technique and successful performance. If any of the players find that they are imaging failure, they should stop the image and start again. Players can also be encouraged to develop their own imagery scripts, which can be recorded on to tape and listened to when necessary. As a coach you might want to check these, to ensure that techniques are accurately described.

IMAGERY PERSPECTIVE

When we perform imagery, it is possible to do so from two different perspectives. The first perspective is known as 'external imagery'. If we are performing external imagery, we are imaging ourselves and the event as if from the outside (i.e. Seeing the whole scenario as if you were watching it played back on TV). It is also possible to image from an 'internal perspective'. When imaging from this perspective you are imaging from inside yourself, as if you were actually there. This means that you would not see your whole body; you would see only what is visible if you were actually there (e.g. You would see your hand holding the racket, the net, your opponent, the shuttle etc.).

You might find that some of your players naturally adopt the external perspective, whilst others find the internal perspective easier. Originally sports psychologists advised athletes to always take an 'internal imagery' perspective, as it was felt that this created a more realistic and life-like image. Nowadays it is generally agreed that both internal and external imagery can be useful. Whilst internal imagery perhaps does allow for a more realistic image to be created, external imagery allows athletes the opportunity of scrutinising their own technique, as well as seeing the whole picture. Using imagery scripts, you can direct your players to use internal or external imagery as required.



5.5 Thought-stopping

Negative, disruptive thoughts must be stopped. The thought-stopping technique is described in the 'Learning to Play' stage. Remember that each player must find a trigger that works for them. Once the thought has been stopped, it is important that it is replaced otherwise it will come back. To enhance confidence, the negative thoughts must be replaced with positive ones.

CHANGING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS TO POSITIVE

Replacement thoughts should be positive or at the very least constructive/helpful. It can be difficult to think positively in the heat of competition, so it is best to prepare for negative thoughts beforehand.

Exercise

Ask players to go back to the list of negative thoughts they created in the previous exercise. For each negative thought they must come up with a replacement positive one.

e.g. 'She looks really fit; I'll never be able to keep up with her'. Could be replaced with 'I know her weakest shots and I have a plan to deal with her' or 'I'm a lot fitter than I was the last time I played her, she won't be expecting that'.

To make these positive thoughts easier to remember in competition, they can be reduced to relevant key words or phrases that capture the essence of the thought. For example, "I have a plan" or "I can keep going."

EVIDENCE

Replacing the negative thought with a positive one is more effective if the athlete actually believes in the positive thought. To help the athlete to believe the positive thought they must have concrete evidence to draw upon. This evidence could be a record of scores on the bleep test, a note of training drills etc. Keeping a training log of drills and accomplishments should be used to help athletes to construct their positive thoughts.

5.6 Concentration skills

Concentration can be disrupted by what is going on around us (external factors) and by what is going on in our own minds (internal factors). In the sections on self-talk, we have already discussed how what we are thinking can affect how we feel and ultimately how we perform. We discussed how confidence can be enhanced by stopping negative thoughts and replacing them with positive ones. The same process can be adapted to aid concentration. In this case irrelevant thoughts are replaced with relevant ones. In order to do this, players need to know what they should and should not be focusing on. Using the exercise previously performed done to record self-talk, ask players to note down the types of thoughts they are having and then go through those thoughts with them to identify which ones should be replaced. For example an irrelevant thought when serving might be 'If I win this point then I'll win the championship and I'll be the first English player ever to do that'. This thought could be replaced by a more relevant one, such as focusing on the action required for the serve 'push' or 'smooth'.

As with the negative thoughts, players need to identify the likely trouble spots when their minds wander and concentration is lost. That way the situations can be pre-empted, with appropriate key words at the ready. Sometimes it is not our own thoughts that distract us, but external events. These events could include crowd noise, incidents on other courts, a selector/significant person watching, the behaviour of an opponent or an official or even the expression of a coach. In order to deal with external distractions players can undergo what is known as simulation training.

SIMULATION TRAINING

Simulation training involves exposing the player to likely distractions in a training environment, so that when they face these distractions in competition, they will have some immunity to them. We know that human beings are most distracted by unexpected events, particularly if they are loud or distinctive. As such, simulation training helps to create familiarity.

Exercise One

Select a training session to simulate competition. Prior to the session get the players to list all the external distractions that could arise during a game. Although you can never create the exact competition environment, some distractions can be recreated. E.g. you could have multiple games going on, with scores being shouted out, you could have bad line calls etc.

5.7 Game focus plans/ Pre-performance Routines

Athletes can develop the ability to get into their performance zone by associating performance with certain routines/protocols. Ultimately the player's mind and body cues into these routine behaviours as a sign that they are about to perform and automatically shifts into a state of performance readiness. Each player may have a slightly different routine, but there may be core activities that have to be incorporated (e.g. Warm-up/stretching, racket warm-up).

Whatever the routine, it has to be practiced consistently and used before every competition. Often players change their routines for big tournaments. This is a mistake, as it cues the mind and body into thinking that something 'special or different' is about to happen. This can cue a panic response that can result in a poor performance.

You must be careful that routines do not become rituals.

RITUALS

Rituals are different to routines in that they can become controlling. An example of a ritual would be always wearing a certain pair of socks or always using the same shower stall. The problem here is that if the pair of socks is lost or someone else is using the shower stall, the player cannot perform. Routines should be flexible enough to be able to accommodate unforeseen events such as time delays, but should be within the player's control as much as possible.

WHEN TO USE ROUTINES

Routines can be used at a variety of points in relation to competition. A player could develop a consistent routine for the night before a match, as well as one for the morning of the match. In fact players can even make use of routines on court e.g. A routine prior to serving and a routine prior to receiving serve.

WHAT GOES INTO A ROUTINE?

As stated earlier, a pre-performance routine can include physical warm-ups, but it could also include a mental warm-up. This could be as simple as taking a couple of deep breaths, engaging in imagery or reading over a few key words. Since different athletes may find that different routines work for them, you as a coach may need to allow for flexibility in preparation.

Exercise

To record the routine that your players may naturally undertake, use Appendix III to record their behaviour. After the competition you should sit down with your players to see if you both agree that their pre and post-match routines were beneficial.

5.8 Match Preparation

Pre-performance routines are just one component of the wider issue of match preparation. If pre-competition preparation is left to chance, it is unlikely that athletes will be able to consistently create the ideal performance state. The more in control the athlete feels in his/her preparation, the more confident, focused and relaxed he/she is likely to be. Obviously an athlete who does not allow enough time to do a proper warm-up, hasn't had enough sleep or forgets to bring a spare racket or a bottle of water is unlikely to be concentrating fully on the match. As such, a basic form of match preparation is about being organised. Players at this stage should be encouraged to think for themselves about how much sleep they need, how much time they need for their warm-up, what equipment (including spares) they need to take with them. In the 'Training to Compete' stage, preparation can be extended to explore personal preparation requirements.

SECTION 6

Training to Compete (Males 16-18, Females 15-17)

The aim of this stage is performance analysis. It is important to be able to identify the specific psychological skills that a particular player needs to develop. The early stages are mainly about learning the techniques to develop the skills, but in this stage the key point is to make sport psychology specific to the needs of the athlete.

6.1 Performance tracking and match preparation

MATCH PREPARATION AND PERFORMANCE TRACKING

Match preparation is extremely individual. What works for one player will not necessarily work for another player. Some players find it helpful to sit and watch opponents before a match, whereas others prefer to get away from the sports hall until they are ready to play. Unfortunately most players do not give enough thought to what they want and/or need to do prior to performance; rather it becomes a case of trial and error or tradition. In order to discover what a player's ideal performance state is and how they can best get into this state, it is important that players begin to systematically track their behaviours and then relate these behaviours to subsequent performances. Not only will this exercise help players to become more self-aware, the discovery of behavioural patterns that are associated with good performance can help players to devise and implement effective match preparation strategies.

EXERCISE ONE MATCH PREPARATION TRACKING WORKSHEET

For each match ask players to complete the match preparation tracking sheet found in Appendix IV. This exercise is designed to help players to begin tracking their pre-performance behaviour and mental and physical states. The idea is to keep a record of what they do and how they feel prior to performance. This information can then be matched to the performances themselves. Once enough information has been gathered you will hopefully be able to see patterns and links between certain behaviours/states, feelings and performances. Pre-match preparation routines should be based on those behaviour patterns that have been found to be helpful for optimal performance.

Initially players should aim to complete one sheet per match for approximately 4 weeks. At the end of this time you should look through the sheets with the players and identify key behaviours and states that seem to precipitate good performances. Once the optimal behaviours have been identified, you should help the players to incorporate these behaviours into their match preparation.

The current sheet asks players to consider behaviours from the evening before the match onwards. Once they have established these behaviours they can also analyse from further back in the performance preparation (e.g. Day before the match).

6.2 Evaluation of performance (training diaries)

PERFORMANCE PROFILE WHEEL (SEE APPENDIX V)

Put one attribute in each of the shaded segments then colour in the appropriate number of segments for that attribute to depict the athlete's score on each one. Separate wheels can be done for physical, mental and technical skills. You can also adapt the number of segments depending on the number of attributes generated.

TRAINING DIARIES

Another way of profiling performance is to keep a training diary. Training diaries serve as a log of work completed in training, as well as a record of past performances. As well as recording what has been worked on, players should be encouraged to keep a record of competition performances. These records do not have to be long, but should address the following questions:

Whom did you play?

What were the scores?

How happy were you with your performance? (Scale of 1-10)

What did you do well?

What could you have done better?

What do you think you should work on in training?

What do you need to watch out for/remember the next time you play this opponent?

See Appendix VI for an example match evaluation sheet

6.3 Progression of PMR skills

In basic PMR (discussed earlier in this book), the player is asked to do an all out muscle contraction for each muscle group, followed by complete relaxation of that muscle. This is performed so that the player can more easily experience the difference between tension and relaxation. Basic PMR is ideal for beginners as an introduction to relaxation and can be used to aid sleep the night before competition. However, because basic PMR is a lengthy process and engenders very deep states of relaxation, it is not appropriate for use in competition. In real life players would rarely experience all-out muscle contractions, nor would they want to completely relax all their muscles. Instead, players need to be able to fine-tune the levels of tension in their muscles so that they are at a level appropriate to the task at hand. Basic PMR is only the first stage in mastering control of muscle tension.

Once the player has mastered basic PMR, he/she will have a good idea of the difference between what muscles feel like when they are very tense and what they feel like when they are very relaxed. In order to apply this knowledge to performance, players need to be encouraged to think about how their muscles feel when they are performing well (E.g. When serving well, which muscles need to be tense and which need to be relaxed?)

Exercise One

- During a training drill or practice match, ask players to notice how tense/relaxed their muscles feel. They should note which muscle groups are tense and which are relaxed and whether they are happy with the way their muscles feel. As a coach you can provide them with some direction as to which muscles should be tense and which should be relaxed for particular skills/shots. From this exercise it should be made clear to players that they do not necessarily need to completely relax all their muscles (e.g. Some muscle tension is required to hold the racket!)

In basic PMR players were asked to artificially create muscle tension prior to relaxation by clenching the muscle group and then releasing. In a real life game situation players need to be able to relax any muscles that are tense, without artificially creating the tension first. Exercise Two will help them to learn to do this.

Exercise Two

- Ask players to complete the usual basic PMR exercise, but this time rather than do an all out muscle contraction they should generate half as much tension (50% contraction) and then do a full release. As players get more used to this exercise, they can continue to reduce the amount of tension created in the tension phase, until they can identify any tension that is naturally occurring in the body and release it.
- Once players have become adept at identifying tension and releasing it, a similar exercise can be implemented to help them to gain control of the 'release/relaxation' phase.

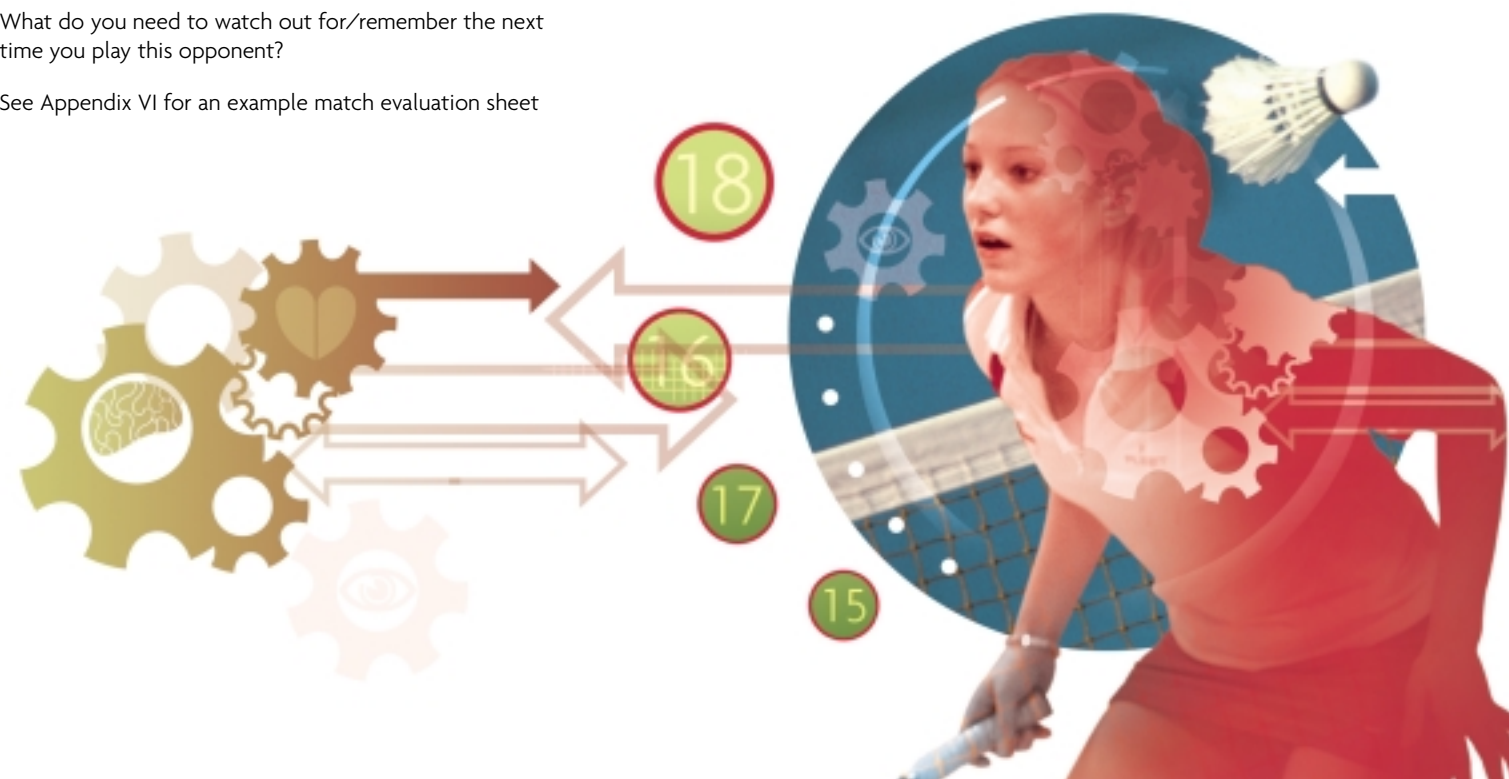
Exercise Three

- Ask players to go through each major muscle group in the body and identify tension (as above), but this time players release only half of the tension (50% release). As players get more used to this exercise, they can continue to reduce the amount of relaxation, until they can relax to a level that is appropriate to performance.

Exercise Four

- Repeat exercise one, but this time ask the players to identify inappropriate levels of tension and amend them.

Prior to each game players should get into the habit of doing a full body check, scanning from head to toe and stopping at muscle groups where the tension level is too high. Release the tension to the appropriate level.



6.4 Consistency

When sport psychologists talk about consistency, we are really talking about two different things. Firstly, we mean that players are as committed to training as they are to competition and secondly, we mean that players are able to reproduce the quality shots that they are able to play in training, under the pressure conditions of competition.

In fact these two different aspects of consistency are strongly linked because if you have not completed high quality training then you will not be able to produce a high quality performance under pressure. The reasoning behind this is that when we are put under pressure we immediately slip back in to what is safe and familiar. This is the theory behind over learning a skill. You practice and practice until the skill becomes automatic, so that when you are put under pressure you don't have to think about performing the skill your body will just naturally do it.

Imagine a player who has just started trying to change the hitting action of his smash to make it more accurate. He may remember to do this at first, but as soon as he is put under pressure he will slip back in to his old familiar technique, because that is what he is used to doing. In simple terms if you indulge in poor quality training, playing lazy shots and using sloppy footwork then that is what will come out when you are put under pressure.

Players spend much more time training than they do competing, and training day in and day out can become repetitive and boring. It is all too easy to let the intensity drop and to coast through a training session, but in the long-term this is a recipe for disaster. So what can a coach do to get the best out of his/her players in every training session?

The answer is relatively simple; you must ensure that your players feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for their own training programme. Sport psychologists know that people feel more motivated when they experience feelings of competence and control. One way to achieve player ownership is to set goals for training.

These goals should be clearly linked to each player's long-term goal, so that players can see how training is helping them to progress towards their ultimate goal. It is likely that you as a coach always have goals for training, but to get the players to take ownership, they need to be involved in the goal-setting process. That way they can include some individualised goals that will enable them to tailor training to suit their own needs, even in a group environment. Goal-setting can be reinforced by the use of training diaries. Players should be encouraged to look through their training diaries to identify areas they would like to work on in training and to record their progress.

Another tactic that you can try, which is discussed in the FUNdamentals section is to create a code of conduct for training, that will encourage players to focus during training sessions. For example, rules about turning up on time, maintaining high quality feeding, maintaining a certain level of intensity of effort can all be used to promote a professional attitude.

In order to achieve under pressure, players need to be able to attain an appropriate level of arousal, control their thoughts and screen out irrelevant distractions. Appropriate match preparation (discussed in the Training to Train section) is important to ensure that players are adequately prepared for the 'big match' situation. Players must use their pre-match routine prior to every competition no matter what standard the competition is. Grandslams, satellite tournaments and national championships should all be approached in the same way. Many players have a set routine that they use to prepare for competitions, but make the mistake of changing their routine for the 'big match'. Doing something different to the norm immediately places emphasis upon the importance of the situation, which increases feelings of anxiety.

In order to further normalise the 'big match' situation, simulation training should take place. Simulation training can be used to habituate to the competition environment. A practice competition that mirrors the actual competition as closely as possible can be devised. This should be as realistic as you can possibly make it, for example players should be provided with a list of the draw, and specific start times. There should be service judges and line judges, and a 90 second break between games, whatever you can do to make the conditions similar. The idea is that you are trying to habituate the players to the environment so that when they get there the situation seems familiar and therefore less anxiety provoking.

There are also techniques that players can use in those crunch moments during competition. Pre-performance routines enable athletes to attain the appropriate mind-set for competition. Thought-stopping helps the athlete to banish negative thoughts, which improves confidence and concentration, and momentary relaxation can be used to calm nerves before that vital serve or return. All of these techniques are explained in the 'Training to Train' section.

SECTION 7

Training to Win (Males 18-23, Females 17-22)

The aim of this stage is to create an individualised mental training programme for each of your players. Using your knowledge of sport psychology you should be able to create a profile of each of your player's strengths and weaknesses, and using this information develop a mental training programme to enhance strengths and combat weaknesses.

7.1 Identify performance restricting mental weaknesses

Performance analysis should be carried out regularly in order to ensure that your players are always making the most effective use of training. The performance profile wheel introduced at the 'Training to Compete' stage can be used regularly throughout the year to identify psychological strengths and weaknesses. This information can be supplemented by regular observations of your athlete in training and competition. If video technology is available, filming training and competition is an ideal way to reflect back and analyse performance way from on-court time. The information derived from the profiling wheel should provide a guide as to the areas of weaknesses that you should be alert for.

Practical exercise

Based upon the results of the profiling wheel, select one psychological skill that you feel your player needs to work on, for example concentration. Devise an observation checklist that you can use during competition and training to observe the player's levels of concentration. In order to create the checklist you need to identify the behavioural indicators of lack of concentration. A prime example is that the player is looking around at the other courts or the crowd rather than looking at his/her own court. Other indicators might be that the player makes a series of mistakes following a line call against him/her or after losing a long rally. Similar checklists can be created to identify signs of anxiety (e.g. pacing, fidgeting), motivation (shoulders slumped, not going for shots etc) and confidence (playing a flick serve when a short serve would be more appropriate, making a slow start to a game etc).

Finally, regular one-to-one Personal Player Development meetings with individual players (rather like the sort of annual appraisal an employee might undergo at work) will help you to gather important information about a player's state of mind. The focus of these meetings should be upon the player's perception of his/her recent performances in training and competition.

The key point to remember here is that the player is the expert on his/her thoughts and feelings. Your role is to help the player to develop the appropriate level of self-awareness so that they can begin to identify psychological strengths and weaknesses for themselves, and come to you with ideas about skills that they would like to work on.

7.2 Build and implement mental strategies to overcome weaknesses

At this stage in their playing careers, players should have a good grounding in psychological skills training. However, it is important to remind players of the various strategies they have learnt and to demonstrate how those strategies link directly to the key mental skills of anxiety control, confidence, concentration and motivation. The following checklist provides a quick guide to the way in which strategies can be used to achieve specific skills:

MENTAL SKILLS AND STRATEGIES CHECK LIST

HANDLING PRESSURE

Since there are two components of anxiety - physical (somatic) and mental (cognitive) Physical symptoms include excessive muscle tension, butterflies, shaking and sweating. Players suffering from these symptoms should be directed towards physical (somatic) interventions such as breathing control and PMR. Mental symptoms of anxiety are characterised by worrying and negative thoughts. Players suffering from these symptoms should be directed towards mental (cognitive) intervention strategies such as thought-stopping/changing positive to negative and imagery. Since the mind and body are so strongly linked, it has been suggested that players may benefit from a combination of somatic and cognitive interventions.

CONFIDENCE

We know that the three biggest sources of confidence are past performance experiences, positive feedback (from self and others) and seeing yourself completing the task. As such, in order to enhance confidence, players must try to build up these sources. By using goal-setting players can set challenging but achievable targets that will enable them to experience success. Remember these targets do not have to be about winning, they could be focused on successful execution of a particular shot or even on communication between doubles partners. By broadening the definition of success, a player is able to gain confidence even from games they have not won.

The beauty of goal-setting is that it also fulfils the second source of confidence, positive feedback. By keeping a record of their goals and systematically evaluating them, players are able to enjoy regular positive feedback on their performances.

Taking control of self-talk and changing negative thoughts into positive also helps to maintain positive feedback. Players suffering from a lack of confidence are highly likely to be plagued by negative thoughts. In order to break out of the cycle these thoughts must be interrupted and replaced. As a coach, you should also be aware of the type of feedback you give to your players. Often players receive no positive feedback at the times when they need it the most. Criticising a player who is in a performance slump will not help that player break out of the slump rather it will exacerbate it. Finally, players can be encouraged to see themselves experiencing success by the use of positive imagery. Remember that imagery is about creating as well as recreating, so even those who have not recently experienced success can use imagery to bring it to mind.

CONCENTRATION

Distractions can be both external and internal. In order to combat external distractions such as noise, bad line calls or opponent behaviour, players need to de-sensitise themselves by practising in conditions that mimic those that they find distracting. This is known as simulation training and the conditions should be individually tailored to each player. To deal with internal distractions, which take the form of irrelevant thoughts, players should use the technique of thought-stopping and swapping irrelevant thoughts with relevant ones. In order to be truly focused, players should ensure that they have completed sufficient match preparation. This could involve anything from ensuring they have enough sleep, enough time to get to the venue, have completed an appropriate warm-up and have spare equipment with them. In addition pre-performance routines can help to act as a trigger to get a player into the correct frame of mind to compete.

MOTIVATION

We know that people are motivated when they are made to feel competent. Goal-setting is a key strategy that enables athletes to experience success, therefore it is often effective for use with athletes who are experiencing a drop in motivation. Similarly setting goals can help an athlete to focus, providing direction and a target to aim for. Ideally, players should be encouraged to set goals for both training and competition. In this way, players should know exactly what they are hoping to achieve out of each and every training session - this might be different for different players. Remember at this stage you are trying to encourage players to take a little more responsibility for their own training and performance. Setting goals can provide players with a sense of ownership and gives them a purpose.

Imagery can also help to maintain and enhance motivation. Getting players to engage in positive imagery, particularly imagining themselves achieving what they want to achieve (e.g. Standing on the winner's rostrum), can also provide an incentive to maintain motivation throughout a long season.



SECTION 8

Peak Performance (Males 21+, Females 20+)

8.1 Refine and implement mental strategies to overcome weaknesses

The key issue with mental training for athletes at this stage is to remember that they need to find the strategies that work for them. The same strategy will not necessarily work for two players, even if they both have the same problem. Players need to be encouraged to be open-minded about the techniques, but not to be afraid to try something else if a strategy doesn't work for them. For example, if a player is really struggling with PMR, there is no need to force them through the strategy; instead they could try breathing to control their nerves.

It may also be beneficial to remind the players of what they have done in the past that worked which they may not be doing now or had forgotten about. For example as a junior, a player might have effectively used a competition preparation plan which a couple of years later they have let slip and are not using as regularly as they could. Also, some players may want to check that what they are doing in their mental training is correct or effective and therefore often want to talk through certain aspects of their mental training to get a 'thumbs up' or explore possible ways of doing something differently. Often the players are using more mental skills than they realise but their performance could improve my small but significant margins by simply being more (self) aware of what they are doing in their mental training and preparation.

It is also important that the strategies be adapted to the specific 'badminton situations' in which players find themselves. Although this book has been written specifically to be used with badminton players, you may find that you need to adjust some of the techniques slightly depending upon the discipline (mixed doubles, level doubles or singles) and the highly individualised situations that may occur during a game. For example, a player might have a different pre-shot routine for serving and receiving.

8.2 Tournament preparation and planning

There is no doubt that the tournament calendar is extensive for senior international players. Virtually 12 months of the year are now filled with various types of tournaments from County / Foreign Club to Grand Prix. As a result there is an even greater need for the players to be encourage to take time out (a holiday) as well as regular recovery time during training and while on the road with tournaments. How a player chooses to recover is really up to them but they must recognise how important it is and mentally how crucial it is for their long term sustainability as an international athlete. Mental recovery might simply be about 'switching off' which may take the form of staying in a hotel room reading or watching TV or it may be getting out (but not to be too long on foot) shopping or having a walk and coffee. The risk all players run is if they aren't making time to mentally switch off and physically recover is underperformance and longer term burn out.

Effective tournament scheduling can also help in the recovery/sustainability of the players performance. Make time at the start of every season to initially plan out their tournament schedule and identify key training phases. This process can help to identify where there might be too much (or too little) activity, tournaments too close together and also help maintain perspective on the overall tournament schedule which can be incredibly demanding and often create a feeling of no down time. Through effective planning you can help the players see when their breaks are coming or when they will have a period of time back home to train and work on specific aspects of their play.

Following a tournament or once eliminated from a tournament players may benefit in having a 'plan' (written down) as to how to manage their time effectively before either returning home and back into training or moving on to the next tournament. If eliminated early but going on to another tournament and not returning home what will they need to do physically and mentally to recover and prepare? If successful at a tournament and have only a limited time before the next tournament, what should they do? Therefore, in conjunction with other sport science support the coach and player and develop a plan (or a couple of plans) to suit various scenarios. This ultimately put the athlete in control and helps them take responsibility for their time.

A final point to consider; often players have their best ever match(es) in the early rounds and as the tournament progresses their match play gets worse. As coaches an aim is to help players stay focused for the entire tournament and encourage them to be confidence in their playing ability and belief in themselves as players to 'get better' and build through the tournament rather than having their best ever performance in the qualifiers or first round. How to do this is highlighted in the next section.

8.3 Dealing with the pressure of success or failure

There is no doubt that at the elite level performance is about the outcome - winning. This does not mean that everything written in this handbook gets thrown out the window and forgotten. The way to win is to remember the process and use all the suggested 'tools' appropriately and effectively with your players. It would however, be naïve not to consider performance outcomes and the pressures this brings to elite players.

As coaches you are in a position to help the players maintain a healthy perspective on successful performances as well as underperformances. Therefore it is important to 'get to know' your players in terms of their mindset and how they internalise their performances and results. Some players will be very vocal and express comfortably how they have performed and the impact of their result. Others will be much quieter about their playing and the art of asking good questions will need to be utilised. Regardless of their character it is important to make time with the players to reflect on their performances and the outcome. The timing of this will depend on the player (you may need to ask them when they would like to talk about a match) and also depend on the surroundings or situation you are in e.g., a busy tournament with several players to watch.

"Loss can make you feel miserable, distressed and helpless. But it can also challenge you to test your strength, draw on your capacity to cope, get to know yourself better, examine your priorities and reflect on where you are going, why and how" (Orlick, 1990).

Players will tend to feel most upset by a loss when they have expected to do well or win. Sometimes their expectations of themselves or the tournament are unrealistic (effective goal setting conversation would help this), sometimes they have not prepared as well as they should or could have (again, something they can work on) and then other times things are totally out of their control which impact performance - so it is important for the players to recognise what is in their control and what isn't!

Some losses can be a golden opportunity to learn something that is normally difficult to learn in a typical training environment or other circumstances. Instead of the player going away thinking how terrible they are, how they really blew it, how they let people down they need to gain some perspective - it is not the end of the world! And it doesn't mean they are no-good or a worthless person - their confidence has been knocked but they are still a good person and an exceptional player.

So, what can they learn from their performance that may help them play better next time in a similar situation? Can they practice this in training? What did you observe as the coach, in their performance - are they remembering things that didn't happen? Is there video coverage to analyse with

the players which can really help to bring a reality check to the debrief. Also, for the players to consider; What did they learn about themselves, What did they learn about others around them, their partner, other players, coaches or support staff, What can help them in the future?

The journey to players' self-belief begins with the process of building or re-building confidence. By creating the time to reflect/debrief and exploring some of these types of questions the players, (especially those who are susceptible to being very down after a poor performance or bad loss), can start to see a positive side to their experience and are able to bounce back effectively. Asking the players to reflect on their performance but crucially important to ask them to remember what they did well, what was good about their performance, and write this down! Seeing their 'good' points in black and white can serve as a positive reminder when they are feeling a bit low or nervous before a match - get out these points and be mentally reminded (use imagery) of what they are good at.

Celebrate Success! Something that isn't done enough. Dealing with (or not) the pressures of success can often be related to the fact that fantastic performances are walked away from and not debriefed or celebrated. Within reason, after a successful match or tournament, a break should be taken (this may be a holiday or a meal out with friends). Taking time after a successful match to realise success, what it feels like, feel good about what has happened, relax and enjoy the feelings of success should be taken! Acknowledging success individually as a player, with the coach or with other players or friends can also help to release the potential build of pressure to succeed which the player might be feeling. By talking about what the player is experiencing can also help the coach and the programme to 'deflect' unnecessary requests from 'others' such as the media or exhibitions.

When the pressure is on to perform well and win matches, match after match, tournament after tournament, there must be some time created to reflect on what is going well. Doing so helps in the development of the players' self-awareness - that is, creating the opportunity for the players to really get to know themselves and each other in a partnership better and better. A self-aware player has a greater chance of repeating good performance and success and being consistent in the preparation and playing.

As a coach, engaging the player(s) in post match/tournament debriefs helps you to understand them better and what makes them tick and also creates an opportunity for you to get some feedback from the players on how you 'performed' as a coach. An effective debrief will be reflected in the types of questions the coach asks. To help start the dialogue simple questions such as What went well? What could be better? Or What do you feel helped you? What do you feel hindered you (during a match or during a tournament)?

8.4 Peak Performance lifestyle management

Being an elite player can mean many things but what have your players got to do to aspire and be the best in the world? What is their elite player behaviour? Here are some suggestions to consider:

- Keeping an accurate training diary: monitoring daily training and understanding their training
- Medical issues: seek advice and rehabilitation properly
- Rest and recovery: look after yourself
- Communication with your coach, support staff and other players
- Being 100% in training and competition: daily monitor of yourself - no baggage, try to put emotional issues to one side, no excuses, stay on top of health and injury problems
- Planning ahead
- Being organised

Being an elite player brings a host of challenges on and off-court. Coaches play a crucial role in supporting their players and obtaining additional support when appropriate for both themselves and the players. In summary, take time for attention to detail; to plan programmes and schedules, commit to writing down clear and well understood objectives with the players, address issues that might impact on playing and encouraging good communication.

"Excellence is the result of caring more than others think is wise, risking more than others think is safe, dreaming more than others think is practical and expecting more than others this is possible". (Anon)

RECOMMENDED APPLIED SPORT PSYCHOLOGY BOOKS:

- Bull S.J., Albinson J.G., & Shambrook C.J. (1996). *The Mental Game Plan: Getting Psyched for Sport*. Champaign IL: Human Kinetics.
- Martens, R. (1987). *Coaches Guide to Sport Psychology*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Miller, B. (1997). *Gold Minds: The Psychology of Winning in Sport*. Wiltshire: Crowood Press.
- Nideffer, R. (1992). *Psyched to Win. How to master mental skills to improve your physical performance*. Champaign IL: Leisure Press.
- Orlick, T. (1990). *In Pursuit of Excellence*. Champaign, IL: Leisure Press.
- Orlick, T. (1986). *Psyching for Sport; Mental Training for Athletes*. Champaign, IL: Leisure Press.
- Weinberg, R. (1988). *The Mental Advantage. Developing your psychological skills in tennis*. Champaign, IL: Leisure Press.



APPENDIX I

Basic PMR Script

Close your eyes ands begin to focus on your breathing. Take a long, slow, deep breath. Release the breath slowly and completely. Take another deep breath and slowly release. Each time you breathe out feel yourself becoming more and more relaxed (Allow around 15-30 seconds of deep breathing).

I want you to continue breathing slowly and deeply, and as you are doing this listen to my voice as I take you through this relaxation exercise. We are going to progress through each of the major muscle groups in the body. First you will tense the muscles for a few seconds, and concentrate on the feelings of tension, and then you will release the tension and concentrate on the feelings of relaxation. Remember to continue breathing slowly and deeply at all times. Do not start tensing any muscles until I say NOW, and continue to tense them until I say OKAY RELAX.

Take a deep breath and release it slowly. I want you to focus on the muscles in your face. Notice the tension that is already present in those muscles (allow 5 seconds for this). You are going to increase that tension by screwing up your face as tightly as possible. Do that NOW. Clench your jaw and squeeze your eyes tightly shut. Keep screwing up your face and focus on that tension. Notice how tense the muscles in your face feel (hold for about 10-15 seconds).

OKAY RELAX. Feel the tension flowing out of the muscles of your face. Enjoy the feelings of relaxation in your face. Breathe in deeply and breathe out slowly, and each time you breathe out feel yourself becoming more and more relaxed, and sinking deeper and deeper in to the floor. (Allow the athletes to focus on the feelings of relaxation for 15-20 seconds).

Focus on the muscles in your neck and shoulders. Notice the tension that is already present in those muscles (allow 5 seconds for this). You are going to increase that tension by raising your shoulders up to your ears and squeezing your shoulder blades together. Do that NOW. Keep squeezing your shoulder blades together, keep pushing your shoulders to your ears, keep squeezing. Notice how tense the muscles in your shoulders feel (hold for about 10-15 seconds).

OKAY RELAX. Feel the tension flowing out of the muscles of your shoulders and enjoy the feelings of relaxation. Breathe in deeply and breathe out slowly, and each time you breathe out feel yourself becoming more and more relaxed, and sinking deeper and deeper in to the floor. Breathe in deeply, breathe out slowly. Notice how relaxed your face and shoulders now feel (Allow the athletes to focus on the feelings of relaxation for 15-20 seconds).

Focus on the muscles in your arms and hands. Notice the tension that is already present in those muscles (allow 5 seconds for this). You are going to increase that tension by raising both of your arms and clenching your fists. Do that NOW. Clench your fists, keep squeezing concentrate on the feelings of tension in your arms and hands, your arms my even be shaking with the effort of clenching your fists (hold for about 10-15 seconds).

APPENDIX II

Performance Action Planning

Areas to work on between

Date

PERFORMANCE GOALS	PROCESS GOALS			
WHAT I WANT TO ACHIEVE...	HOW I AM GOING TO DO IT...	WHO CAN HELP ME?	HOW CAN I MEASURE IT?	COMMENTS

OKAY RELAX. Feel the tension flowing out of the muscles of your arms and hands, and enjoy the feelings of relaxation. Breathe in deeply and breathe out slowly, and each time you breathe out feel yourself becoming more and more relaxed, and feeling heavier and heavier. Breathe in deeply, breathe out slowly. Notice how relaxed your face and shoulders, arms and hands now feel (Allow the athletes to focus on the feelings of relaxation for 15-20 seconds).

Turn your attention to the muscles in your stomach. Notice any tension that is already present (allow 5 seconds for this). You are going to increase that tension by clenching your abdominal muscles as tightly as you can. Do that NOW. Clench your muscles, suck in your stomach and try to make it as tight as possible. Keep squeezing and concentrate on the feelings of tension in your stomach (hold for about 10-15 seconds).

OKAY RELAX. Feel the tension flowing out of the muscles of your stomach, and enjoy the feelings of relaxation. Breathe in deeply and breathe out slowly, and each time you breathe out feel yourself becoming more and more relaxed, and feeling heavier and heavier. Breathe in deeply, breathe out slowly. Notice how relaxed your upper body now feels. Concentrate on breathing deeply and slowly (Allow the athletes to focus on the feelings of relaxation for 15-20 seconds).

Turn your attention to the muscles in your legs and feet. Notice the tension that is already present in those muscles (allow 5 seconds for this). You are going to increase that tension by pointing the toes of both feet back towards your head. Do that NOW. Imagine that you have a rope around your feet and someone is pulling the rope towards your head. Keep pointing, keep pointing (hold for about 10-15 seconds).

OKAY RELAX. Feel the tension flowing out of the muscles of your legs and feet, and enjoy the feelings of relaxation. Breathe in deeply and breathe out slowly, and each time you breathe out feel yourself becoming more and more relaxed, and sinking deeper and deeper in to the floor. Breathe in deeply, breathe out slowly. Notice how relaxed your whole body now feels. Concentrate on breathing deeply and slowly and with each breath allow yourself to relax a little more (Allow the athletes to focus on the feelings of relaxation for 15-20 seconds).

BRINGING THEM OUT OF THE RELAXED STATE
In a few moments you are going to come out of this relaxed state. It is important that you do not get up to quickly as you have undergone deep relaxation. Begin to take some deep breaths and release them quickly (allow 30 seconds for this). Start to stretch and move your arms and legs (allow 30 seconds for this). When you are ready, open your eyes and pay attention to your surrounding. After a few minutes you should slowly sit up.

APPENDIX III

Pre and Post Routines and interaction with coaches and support staff

NAME:

One to Three Days Before:

Night Before:

Morning of:

3 hours before:

1 hour before:

15 minutes before:

After knock up:

Between games:

Post match input from coach(es):

Post match input from other support staff

NAME:

One to Three Days Before (the sort of training sessions you thinks works well in preparation for a tournament and any lifestyle factors):

Night Before:

Morning of (the time from getting up to practice hit):

3 hours before (the time after your practice hit):

45 min. - 1 hour before (warm up):

15 minutes before the match:

Before and After knock up:

Between games - coach support (what you like to hear from them):

Post match input from coach(es) (what you want to hear and when):

Post match input from other support staff

APPENDIX IV

Match Preparation Tracking Sheet

Match (Specify date, opponent, level, start-time, home/away)

Evening prior to match - Behaviour (What did you do? What did you eat/drink? What time did you go to bed?) Etc.

Evening prior to match - Physical state (Are you tired? Are you feeling fit? Do you have any illness/injuries? Etc.

Evening prior to match - Mental state (Are you nervous? Are you relaxed? Are you confident? Are you worried? Are you excited? Are you wound up? Are you thinking about the match or trying not to? Etc.)

Morning of match - Behaviour (What did you do? What did you eat/drink? What time did you get up? How well did you sleep? How and when did you warm up? Etc)

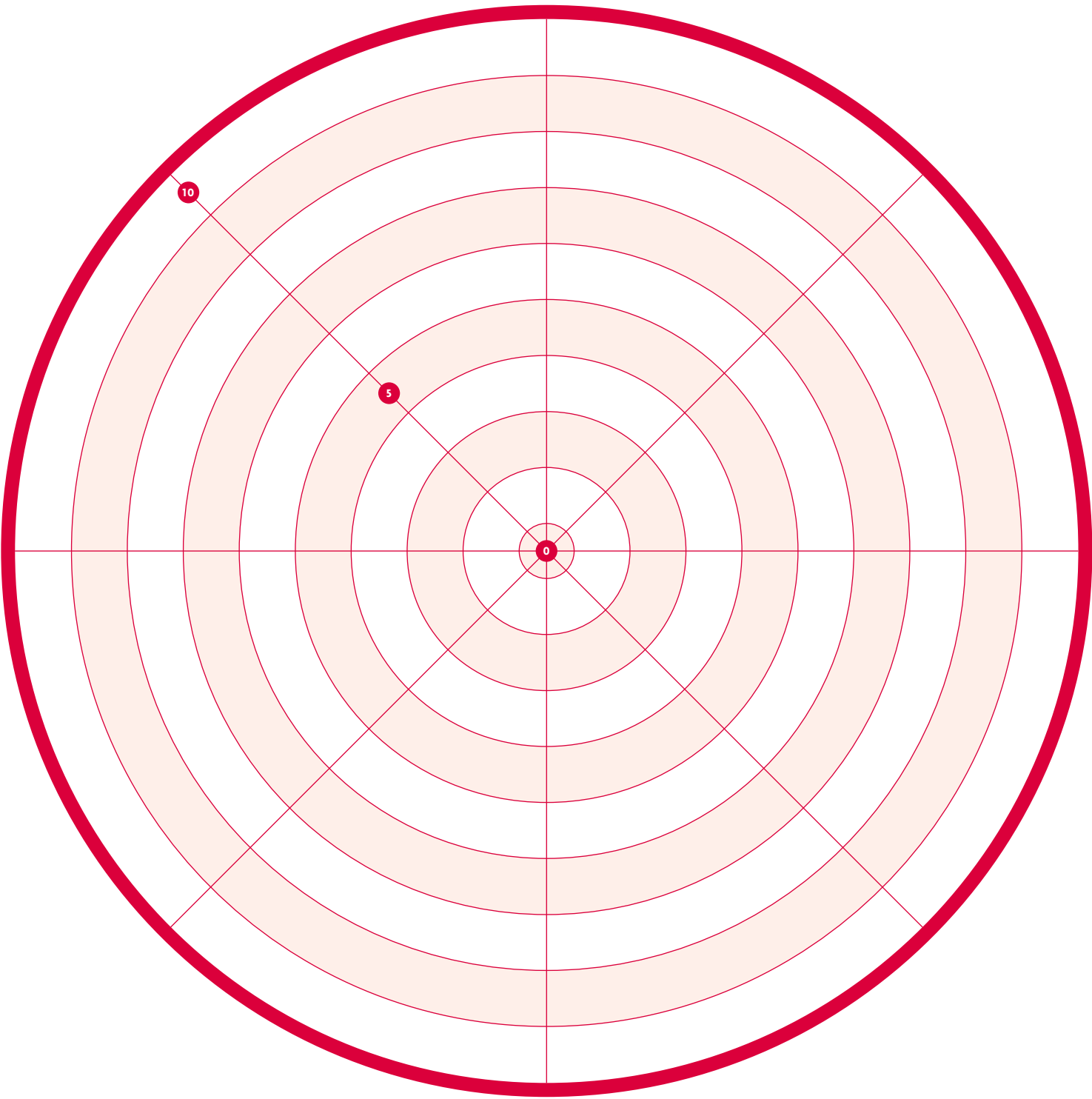
Morning of match - Physical state (Are you tired? Are you feeling fit? Do you have any illness/injuries? Etc.)

Morning of match - Mental state (Are you nervous? Are you relaxed? Are you confident? Are you worried? Are you excited? Are you wound up? Etc.

Result (How did you perform? How happy are you with your performance?)

APPENDIX V

Performance Profile Wheel



APPENDIX VI

Match Evaluation Sheet

Venue: _____ Date: _____ Opposition: _____
Type of Court: _____ Final Full Score: _____ Duration of Match: _____

Rate on a five-point scale: 1 = THE PITS! 2 = BELOW AVERAGE 3 = AVERAGE 4 = ABOVE AVERAGE 5 = VERY GOOD

Pre-match Game Plan	1	2	3	4	5
Pre-match 'appetite'	1	2	3	4	5
'Tuning-in' ability/Mental Warm-up	1	2	3	4	5
Quality of warm-up/Physical	1	2	3	4	5
Concentration capacity	1	2	3	4	5
Quality of warm-down	1	2	3	4	5
Feeling after match	1	2	3	4	5

• Which two, or more, aspects of the match were you most happy with?
1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____

• Which features of the match were you least happy with?
1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____

• Opponent's:
Strengths: _____
Weaknesses: _____