

## Chapter 1

### Introduction To Mental Skills

As an athlete you put in numerous hours of training to prepare your body. You run, jump, kick, swing or throw more in one season than most people do in a lifetime. You train week after week to the point of exhaustion. You train diligently. You are supremely aware of your body. You train to become fast, strong and powerful! You train hard to be the best you can be. But are you doing everything you can to be the best you can be?

Athletes often train the physical component with a well-planned, systematic program that focuses on the physiological aspects, yet the mental training tools have not been provided and practiced. Mental skills training are often not an important component of training because few athletes and coaches are formally exposed to mental skills and drills.

How important is the mental side of athletics? How ironic that both athletes and coaches consider mental skills to be an extremely important part of high performance, but yet do not take the time to learn and develop a systematic program to develop the mental skills.

The mind controls the body, and as an athlete you want control over what your physical energy can create. Only when you have a fully prepared mind can you reach your full potential and perform at your peak. Like physical training, mental training must be practiced on a consistent basis. *Mental Skills and Drills for Athletes* has been designed to prepare you mentally to practice and compete to your potential. It supplies mental skills and drills that will allow you to develop your mental skills and become a better athlete. Only you can make the decision to commit to the mental program to improve.

How important is the mental side of athletics? Complete *Activity 1.1 Why Mental Training* to determine what importance you place on the mental component of track and field.

### Activity 1.1: How much of athletics is mental?

What percentage of your performance is mental?	_____
What percentage of your performance is physical	_____
What percentage of your time do you spend training for the mental side?	_____
What percentage of your time do you spend training for the physical side?	_____
Many coaches and athletes believe a large percentage of their performance is mental but they don't train for the mental side. Could this be you?	
Think of how many times your performance suffered from a lack of confidence, focus or determination?	
Do you believe that mental training could improve your game? How could it improve it?	

Although it is hard to place an exact percentage that the mental part plays in athletics we can agree that it is an extremely important part of the game. Would you take a week of practice off and show up on game day ready to play without any physical practice? Sounds funny, doesn't it? However, many athletes are told to get psyched up and be mentally tough for the big competition, yet the athlete may not have the training tools to accomplish that task because they have not practiced it.

In surveys conducted of Olympic Track and Field athletes, all of the athletes engaged in mental training. In comparison to the average high school athlete, 90% do not engage in a systematic mental training program. Which group would you like to be in? What is the one thing the Olympic athletes have in common? They prepare their minds as well as the body to perform at the highest level. In fact, the physical preparation sets the stage and the mental preparation allows them to achieve optimal performance.

Many people believe that mental toughness is a genetic quality. Either they are fortunate to have been born with mental toughness or not. Contrary to what some might think, a person is not born with mental toughness. Mental abilities can be learned and developed just as physical skills and strength can be learned and developed.

Another potential reason why mental skills training is not an important component of training is that few athletes and coaches are ever formally exposed to them. Coaches and athletes are very knowledgeable about the physical skills, strategies of their sport, including weight training and athletic training. However, little education and training is available for coaches and athletes in the areas of mental training—unless they seek it out on their own.

Think about when you performed your best. Wouldn't it be nice to be in the flow all the time? A mental skills training program that is consistently practiced over time can lead to an increased chance of performing in the flow. Two major goals of mental skills training are to learn and implement skills to: (1) make high-level performance more consistent, and (2) enhance performance by allowing you to reach more of your potential.

Complete *Activity 1.2 Most Memorable Sports Performance* to recall a memorable sports performance and examine how you felt that day.

<b>Activity 1.2: Most Memorable Performance</b>
Think of one of your best performances ever. It may be in a sport or it could be in something else, such as singing or giving a speech. Recall a time when you felt so good and everything came together perfectly. Recall it in as much detail as possible.
Where were you?
What were you doing?
How did you feel?
Why do you think you performed so well that day?

### **Similarities between physical strength training and mental strength training**

1. Planned systematic approach  
Mental skills training should be integrated into your program on a regular, on-going basis. How effective would a strength training program be if you did it one or two times during the preseason and then never did it again? Mental skills training is not a one-time magical program, but it must be implemented and integrated throughout all the training periods to be maximally effective.
2. Proper progression  
Mental skills training is best developed through proper progression. The beginning stage includes awareness, progresses to education, and then must be implemented into practice and competition, then evaluated. Would you start off your weight training program by maximally lifting the day before a game expecting to be suddenly physically strong? Unfortunately, many coaches and athletes expect immediate help in the mental areas without going through the preliminary stages to build a strong foundation in mental skill development.

3. Initial decrease in performance  
When you begin a strength training program, your muscles breakdown at first in order to build themselves up later. The initial stages of a mental training program may often see a decrease in performance. With mental training, performers may have some initial difficulties as they learn and change mental habits. These frustrations may cause athletes to consider quitting the mental skills training program. However, once skills become habits, they will be much easier to use. It is recommended that mental skills training be initiated in the off-season or early in the pre-season so skills can be well learned during the season.
4. Delayed observable benefits  
Physical strength gains are seldom observed until 4-6 weeks of training. Similarly, mental skills may not have an observable immediate impact. Athletes should be encouraged to continue practice and developing skills on a systematic basis and be patient in obtaining the desired results.
5. Individualized  
Athletes begin their physical training at different levels of physical or mental strength. A specific mental training program should be specifically designed to meet the needs of the individual. The focus should be on personal mental strengths and areas for improvement.
6. Takes work and effort  
Just like strength training, mental skills training is not a miracle solution. Mental training cannot be expected to produce instant success. Mental training does not guarantee success. It does however, greatly improve the odds of being successful. The best approach combines physical practice, mental practice, strength training, and proper nutrition for best results. Find a balance that you feel comfortable with.

## Evidence that Mental Skills Training Works

Implementing an effective mental skills training program can be a very challenging task. Athletes and coaches who consider using a mental training program often have questions such as, “Am I convinced that mental training is worthwhile?” “What elements do I include in the program?” “What type of encouragement and support is needed to develop mental skills?” As an athlete, you may not believe in the importance of mental skills training and may need to be convinced of its importance. Mental skills training is most effective when there is a commitment and belief on the part of the athlete, and a commitment to practice and apply the mental skills, and the belief that the mental skills and drills will contribute to development and enhanced performance.

My favorite activity for demonstrating evidence of the mind-body connection for mental skills training is *Activity 1.3 Chevreul’s Pendulum*. Try Chevreul’s pendulum and you will be amazed with the mind-body connection.

<b>Activity 1.3: Chevreul’s Pendulum</b>	
<b>Objective:</b>	To demonstrate the link between the body and the mind.
<b>Directions:</b>	Take a 6” piece of string and tie a small weight on it. It can be something like a key or a nail. Hold the string between your forefinger and thumb with the elbow supported on the table. The weight should be steadied to be motionless with your other hand. Hold the string so the key is above the intersection of two perpendicular lines below. Now remove your hand that is steadying the weight. Focus on the weight and see it going back and forth, sideways. See the weight move from one side of the paper to the other side, back and forth. Then, see the weight stop and move toward you and away from you. See it as it comes toward you and then away from you, toward you and away from you. You may be surprised to see the weight actually moving.
	What happened? The mind is sending the message through the nerves for the muscle to contract. The muscles are contracting but the contraction is so small that the string and weight have to be used to magnify the movement so that it can be visually seen. When you actually see the movements occur it is a strong visual of the mind body connection where just thinking about the movement causes muscle contraction.

Just by thinking about it, the mind is sending the message through the nerves for the muscle to contract. When you actually see the movements occur it is a strong visual of the mind-body connection where just thinking about the movement causes muscle contraction.

Although it is easy to touch your muscles that move, as hard as we may try, it is impossible to touch the thoughts in your mind. The Chevreul’s pendulum activity is a powerful demonstration of a mind-body connection.

Mental skills training is often misunderstood and viewed as a reaction to a problem. In fact, an effective mental skills training program is proactive and tries to prevent problems before they happen.

Take *Activity 1. 4 Mental Skill Training Quiz* to see what you know about mental skills training.

<b>Activity 1.4: Mental Skills Training Quiz</b>		
True or False		
1.	T F	Athletes are born (innate) with strong mental skills.
2.	T F	Mental skills training works immediately.
3.	T F	Mental skills training is too time consuming.
4.	T F	Mental skills training is only for psychological whackos.
5.	T F	Mental skills training is only for elite athletes.
6.	T F	Mental skills training is about performing miracles.
7.	T F	Mental skills training guarantees a top performance at the right time.
8.	T F	Mental skills training works by simply reading about it.
9.	T F	Mental skills training is a substitute for physical conditioning and technique training.
10.	T F	Mental skills training will not turn a loser into a winner.

### **Myths of Mental Skills Training**

To better understand mental skills training, let's take a further look in mental training myths.

#### **1. Athletes are born (innate) with strong mental skills.**

Just like some athletes are born genetically with more physical talents than others, some athletes are born with more mental skills ability than others. The statement that there is little you can do to improve mental toughness is a myth. Just like the physical skills that can be improved through training, so too can the mental skills be developed through training. Motivation, staying relaxed, maintaining concentration and confidence are all mental skills that can be learned through a systematic mental skills training program. Mental training can help athletes achieve peak performance results far beyond what they ever thought possible.

## **2. Mental skills training works immediately.**

A big myth about mental skills training is that a big speech or a single session devoted to the mental game just before the competition will jump start the athlete for a greatly improved performance. We have evidence that with numerous hours of physical practice, athletes can perform a skill automatically with conscious thought. The same is true for mental skills training. Some benefits can be realized immediately in a mental skills training program. However, it is not magic. Some techniques need more time and effort to be successful. Just like physical training, the higher the degree of performance desired, the more rigorous is the work needed in the mental skills program.

## **3. Mental skills training is too time consuming.**

One of the biggest roadblocks to coaches not implementing a mental skills training program is because of the time factor. Athletes and coaches feel they barely have time to work on the athlete's physical skill and do not have time to focus on the mental game. Just like the development of the physical component of athletes, the development of the mental game takes time also. When first beginning a mental skills program, working 15-20 minutes a day over several days per week has been proven to be effective. If 15-20 minutes cannot be allotted, five to 10 minutes a day can be beneficial. Athletes should be given "homework" that they do on their own to start developing and refining their mental skills. Once the athlete understands the basics of mental skills training, it should be integrated into practice, taking little additional practice time. Athletes will be able to use the mental training tools such as relaxation, energization, achieving the proper arousal zone, concentration, imagery, positive self-talk and goal setting to enhance practice sessions.

## **4. Mental skills training is only for psychological whackos.**

The great majority of athletes at the top level use some form of a systematic mental skills training program and have no deep-rooted psychological problems. There has been a long-time stigma associated with sport psychology, that those who need to work on their mental game or are associated with seeing a "shrink" are weak. Because of this stigma, some athletes feel reluctant to work on their mental game in case they are labeled as a head case. Good mental skills training programs are proactive instead of reactive. The purpose of a systematic mental skills training program is to prevent problems occurring (proactive) instead of having to react to problems when they occur.

## **5. Mental skills training is only for elite athletes**

Any level, age, gender, and sport can benefit from the discipline of sports psychology and mental training skills. Mental skills become increasingly important as the level of competition increases. However, as athletes move up in competitiveness, they become more homogeneous in terms of physical skills. Any small difference in mental factors makes a large difference.

Performance will progress faster in young, developing athletes who are provided with a systematic mental skills program. The optimal time for beginning MST is when athletes are first beginning their sport. An early foundation in MST lays the foundation to help athletes develop to their full potential.

**6. Mental skills training is about performing miracles.**

Athletes should have realistic expectations of what mental skill training can and cannot do. Some athletes expect top results with a minimal effort. After a few sessions of mental skills training, some athletes want to quit because a miracle has not happened. However, athletes would not expect to become great after a week of physical training. It takes years of physical training to reach ones potential. Mental skill training is highly beneficial when one has put in the necessary time and effort. Just like physical training, mental skills training will help athletes perform at or near their performance capabilities only with consistent practice.

**7. Mental skills training guarantees a top performance at the right time.**

No method of training or technique can guarantee 100% that an athlete will create a top performance at exactly the right time. There are too many factors other than the psychological component that come into play. However, a systematic mental skills training program increases the odds that an athlete will perform at a peak level more consistently. Research has shown that an athlete with mental skills can reduce anxiety and use learned mental skills to properly concentrate and perform at their highest level under pressure.

**8. Mental skills training works by simply reading about it**

Just as you are reading this now, you are gaining an understanding of mental skills. Understanding the concepts of mental skills training is important and may help performance, but only reading about it will not be enough to help an athlete consistently perform under pressure. Mental training skills need to be practiced, incorporated into practice, and used in actual competitions and mastered.

**9. Mental skills training is a substitute for physical conditioning and technique training**

Despite the benefits derived from mental skill training, it cannot overcome poor technique and physical conditioning. Mental skills training supplements mental training, it is not a replacement for it. Mental training can never completely take the place of hard work and dedication, top physical conditioning, physical skills, and strategic mastery of athletics.



## 10. Mental skills training will not turn a loser into a winner

Labeling people as losers or winners is not a positive and beneficial practice. Numerous individuals and teams that have struggled to have success have improved with the help of a systematic mental skills training program. Many athletes may consider themselves losers because of a lack of self-confidence. Using mental tool such as positive self-talk, relaxation, and energization will help athletes think positive and view themselves as a winner.

*Activity 1.5 Walk The Plank* is designed to look at how a positive mindset and a negative mindset have two complete views in how to achieve a task.

<b>Activity 1.5: Walk the Plank</b>	
<b>Part 1:</b>	Place a board (2 inch x 4 inch approximately 4-6 feet long) on the ground. Who would like to walk the plank? If you feel it is too dangerous to walk across the board, are too nervous or scared of walking across the board as it lays on the ground, you are not required to walk across it. Go ahead and try walking the plank if you dare.
<b>For thought:</b>	Did you walk across the plank? How did you feel as you walked across the plank? Was it hard? Was it easy? Were you scared or nervous?
<b>Part 2:</b>	Imagine the same plank placed between two tall skyscrapers. The plank is placed out one window on the 100 <sup>th</sup> floor to the adjoining skyscraper window on the 100 <sup>th</sup> floor. The plank links the two skyscrapers. Underneath the plank, 100 floors down is the ground. Who would like to walk the plank now?
<b>For thought:</b>	Would you walk across the plank 100 stories high? What were your thoughts in making that decision?
<b>Wrap up:</b>	When the plank is on the ground, it is easy to walk over the plank. You feel confident of your abilities to walk the plank and your self-talk is confident. When the plank is placed 100 stories high, thoughts turn to the negative consequences. What would happen if I fall? I would be flattened like a pancake when I hit the ground. Your mind has changed from thinking of the positive side of performance to the negative consequences of failing. What has changed in this scenario? The board has not changed. The mind has changed from a positive outlook to a negative outlook. This exercise illustrates the importance of positive thinking and self-confidence in achieving a successful performance.

Complete *Activity 1.6 Fight or Flight Response*, which provides another example of the mind-body connection.

### Activity 1.6: Fight or Flight Response

Imagine that you and your buddy are hiking in the wood when you are suddenly confronted by a mean, hungry grizzly bear. What do you do? You don't have time to sit down and think about it. Actually, you only have to outrun your buddy! You have two choices: fight or flight. You can try to outrun the bear (or your buddy) or you can choose to fight the bear. When confronted by an emergency, the body has a natural response by the autonomic nervous system.

What does your body automatically do to prepare to run away from the bear or fight it?

1.

2.

4.

3.

5.

Your body immediately responds physiologically Your heart rate soars, your breathing goes up, your pupils dilate, and your hormones are called in to action! You may even pee your pants! This is an automatic response where what is perceived by your mind is immediately acted upon by the body. This mind-body connection is referred to as the "fight or flight" system.

Will you have time to sit down on the stump and ponder your next move when you encounter the bear? Of course not, you must react immediately. When your mind perceives the situation, your body automatically responds physiologically Your heart rate soars, your breathing goes up, your pupils dilate, and your hormones are called in to action! You may even pee your pants! This is an automatic response where what is perceived by your mind is immediately acted upon by the body. This mind-body connection is referred to as the "fight or flight" system. But remember, when faced with this situation, you may not have to outrun the bear if you can outrun your buddy!

The evidence is starting to pile up that there is a mind-body connection. Another powerful example of how we think and how the body responds to our thoughts is demonstrated in *Activity 1.7 Mugger*.

### Activity 1.7: Mugger or Jogger

You are traveling and staying out-of-town. You go out for a walk, but end up getting lost. It becomes dark and you end up in a bad part of town with the streetlights out. It is a cold night and the wind is blowing. As you try to make your way back to where you are staying, you start to become uneasy with your unfamiliar surroundings. Suddenly, you hear footsteps behind you. Hearing the footsteps, you begin to pick up your pace, walking faster, but the footsteps are getting closer and closer. You walk even faster, but the footsteps continue to get closer. Someone is behind you and getting closer and closer to you. Who is behind you? How do you react?

If you said a mugger was behind you, the fight or flight physiological response was starting to kick in. Your heart would begin to race, you would sweat, the hormones would be activated and numerous other physiological responses would occur to prepare your body for action.

If you said it was a jogger behind you, would you have reacted differently? If you believed it was a jogger, you would have moved aside and encouraged the runner to have a good run. The way our mind interpreted the situation controlled how our body responded.

*Activity 1.8 Think of Pizza* is a fun activity that explores the power of the mind in concentrating. In the chapter on positive self-talk, we will explore the concepts of how to talk to ourselves to become more productive.

### Activity 1.8: Think of Pizza

Think of your favorite food. Think of how good it tastes. Think of how you would like to eat some of your favorite food right now. See yourself eating your favorite food. You can almost smell it and taste how good it is. It may be pizza, steak, seafood, candy, or ice cream. Do not see yourself eating any of those favorite foods.

Now I want you to completely clear your mind of your favorite food. Do not think of your favorite food. Do not think of how good it tastes. Do not think of how you would like to eat some of your favorite food right now. Do not see yourself eating the favorite food. Whether it is pizza, steak, seafood, candy, or ice cream. Do not see yourself eating any of those favorite foods. What happened when you tried to not think of your favorite food?

You still have that image of your favorite food in your mind; I know you do. Why? The brain does not know how to process and interpret the word "Don't." The brain only understands what comes after don't, which in this case is, "think of your favorite food."

You may tell yourself, "do not slow down" or "do not let my competitor pass me." You may say, "do not miss" or "do not foul."

The brain does not know how to process and interpret the word "don't." The brain only understands what comes after don't, which in this case, is 'think of your favorite food.' Specifically, we only hear "slow down, miss, or foul."

Has this happened to you? Have you told yourself not to do something in sport and then it happens?

Can someone really stop thinking? Can you simply clear your mind? How do you relax? When someone tells you to concentrate, focus and pay attention, what are you supposed to focus on, concentrate about, and pay attention to?

One of the reasons you probably participate in your sport is because you like the kinesthetic feelings of physical movement. *Activity 1.9 Iron Arm* provides a physical example on the power of focusing on a mental thought.

### Activity 1.9: Iron Arm

**Part 1:** Pair off with a partner (similar heights if possible) facing each other about an arm's length apart. Partner #1 sets an arm, palm facing up, on partner #2's shoulder. Partner #2 takes his/her hands and links them around partner #1's extended arm right above the elbow. Partner #1 is instructed to tighten his/her arm so as not to let partner #2 bend it with his/her strength downward. Let each partner take a turn in both positions before moving on.

**Part 2:** Repeat the scenario, but this time, have the partners imagine a strong steel bar that extends through their arm making it tight and rigid. The steel bar gives them power and makes their arm unbendable. Once this image is created, have partner #2 push down on the arm. Let each partner take a turn in both positions.

#### **For Thought:**

In part 1, were you able to bend the arm of your partner? Was your partner able to bend your arm?

In part 2, were you able to bend the arm of your partner? Was your partner able to bend your arm?

What was the difference between part 1 and part 2? Why do you believe the difference occurred?

#### **Wrap-up:**

In most cases, when the image of the steel bar is created, the arm is much stronger than when the image is not created. Just imagining the arm as an iron bar made the arm stronger. The image from the brain was transmitted to the muscles to make them stronger. Imagine how this skill could be applied to track and field help increase performance!

I mentioned earlier that it can be a hard concept to accept that mental training is valuable and worthy of your time. I hope the previous exercises have started you thinking of the value of mental skills and how you might use them to enhance your performance. You will not be alone in your use of mental skills training. Many great athletes owe a large part of their success to being mentally strong.

One of the most convincing arguments that mental skills training is beneficial is for athletes to hear or read other athletes' stories. These stories can provide that extra incentive or create an image in the athletes' minds of what is possible and what they need to be able to do to get there. There have been numerous books written by and about successful athletes that can lend some insight into how mental training plays a role in elite athletes' development.

Read *Activity 1.10 Billy Mills: Believe-Believe-Believe*, a classic story of using positive self-talk and a belief in one's self to be successful in order to establish the relationship between mental training and athletic success.

**Activity 1.10**  
**Billy Mills: Believe-Believe-Believe**  
Excerpt from *Motivational Moments in Men's Track and Field*, Roho Publishing



Billy Mills, a Native American (Oglala Lakota (Sioux)), was raised on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. He was orphaned at the age of 12. Mills took up running while attending the Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas. He attended the University of Kansas and earned All-American cross country honors three times and in 1960 he won the individual title in the Big Eight cross country championship. Billy helped lead the University of Kansas track team to the 1959 and 1960 outdoor national championships.

After giving up running for a while, he returned to the sport to qualify for the 1964 Summer Olympics in Tokyo in the 10,000-meter run and the marathon. On October 14, 1964, 38 runners competed in the 10,000-meter final at the Tokyo Olympics. One of the starters was a virtually unknown in the track and field world. Billy Mills of the U.S. with a 10,000-meter best of 29 minutes 10.4 seconds was not expected to be a contender for the medals. However, Mills who had faced discrimination and difficult times his entire life, believed in himself. As he trained for the Olympic Games, he visualized over and over, running the race. In his mind he saw himself running with the leaders and winning! He repeated over and over to himself the affirmation: Believe-Believe-Believe.

The favorite, world-record holder Ron Clarke (Australia), led most of the way with a quick pace. With one lap remaining, Clarke had dropped all his main rivals, but he still had two athletes with him, Mills and Mohamed Gammoudi of Tunisia, both relatively unknown, and both running much faster than they ever had before. The three were hindered by lapped runners on the last lap who made no effort to let them through on the inside. In the back straight, Clarke bumped Mills, pushing him to the outside lanes and causing him to drop back about four meters. At this point, Mills focused on his affirmations: Believe-Believe-Believe, as Gammoudi and Clarke sprinted for the finish. Gammoudi had shaken off Clarke and seemed to have the race won with 50 meters to go before Mills came storming past both of them to win the gold medal. Billy's winning time of 28 minutes 24.4 seconds was a personal record by 50 seconds and a new Olympic record. The race has been called the greatest upset in Olympic history and Mill's victory remains the only Olympic 10,000-meter win in U.S. Olympic history.

**Questions For Thought:**

Why was Billy Mills race so surprising?

How did Billy Mills prepare himself mentally to run in the Olympic Games?

How can you apply the story of Billy Mills to help improve your mental skills?

Billy Mills was a very motivated athlete. Think of an athlete that you are familiar with. Maybe they are on your team or a role model or mentor to you. Complete *Activity 1.11 The Motivated Athlete*, to explore the characteristics of a motivated athlete.

### **Activity 1.11: The Motivated Athlete**

Think of the most motivated athlete you have ever seen.

Who was it? Why do you think they were motivated?

Were they motivated by fear? Were they motivated by extrinsic rewards?

Were they optimistic? What sense of purpose did they have?

I hope you recognized that among other things, the motivated athlete has focus. Motivated athletes have the ability to block out things around them to concentrate on what they need to do. They have built these skills up through practice. I hope you also mentioned they are positive and think like a winner. We all like to associate with winners. *Activity 1.12 Questions for Interview/Guest Speakers* asks you to visit with a winner and see how they think and what makes them successfully tick.

One of the best sources to demonstrate that mental skills are important for success is to interview athletes or have them as guest speakers. These athletes should have demonstrated that they are winners through their mental toughness and their belief and approach in developing the mental game. Encouraging past athletes to speak about their journey can be a particularly meaningful experience for young emerging talent. It also provides another way for elite athletes to give back to the program and inspire others to make that commitment to excel. Often, younger athletes look upon these successful athletes as role models. Sport psychologists, mental trainers, motivation speakers, and well-known coaches, are also some individuals who can be brought in to speak with athletes about mental training. I encourage you to interview someone who fits into the above description. Here are some possible questions to ask in your interview.

### **Activity 1.12: Questions for Interview/Guest Speakers**

What role did mental skills play in your success?

Did you engage in mental skills training? How did you do it?

How much time did you devote to mental training?

What do you owe your success to?

To find current examples of mental training being used by athletes who are performing at the top of their game, use the media. This task can act as a springboard for discussing with athletes, either in a group or individually, the mental aspects necessary to be successful in athletics. *Activity 1.13 Media Examples* can help convince athletes to fully participate. Every day, either online in the sport section of most newspapers, there are excellent examples of the mental side of sport.

### Activity 1.13: Media Examples

Search the media on the Internet, or newspapers and magazines for examples of mental skills used by elite athletes.

Were the examples positive or negative?

Before you start your program, let's find out where you are at right now on your mental game. Complete *Activity 1.14 How's Your Mental Game?*

### Activity 1.14: How's Your Mental Game?

For each question, circle the appropriate number on the scale.

	Sometimes	Always	Never		
1. I talk positively to myself.	1	2	3	4	5
2. A bad performance never gets me down.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I keep working even when I am physically tired	1	2	3	4	5
4. I am excited about going to practice every day.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I always handle anxiety and pressure.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I imagine myself performing flawlessly.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I block out distractions so I can concentrate.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I handle frustration well in practice.	1	2	3	4	5
9. How often do you set goals to help you achieve?	1	2	3	4	5
10. I work with my goals on a daily basis.	1	2	3	4	5

Total Score \_\_\_\_\_

If you scored 10-20 you are in the beginning stages of learning how to become stronger mentally. Absorb all you can.

If you scored 21-30 you are making some headway, but still have much to learn. Jump in headfirst.

If you scored 31-40 you are building a solid mental fitness program. Keep up the good work. Adding mental tools to your mental toolbox will take you to the next level.

If you scored 41-50 you have a strong mental fitness profile. Congratulations! By adding more mental tools to your toolbox, think about how good your performances can be!

### **The Next Step Is Yours**

What factors above can you begin improving on right now? Make the decision to improve your mental skills starting right now?

After reading this chapter, I hope that you are excited about mental skills training and convinced that it works. Understanding mental skills training provides you with crucial information to becoming a better athlete or coach. You may recognize that you are already using some of the mental training tools. If so, congratulations, you are already started on your way. You may feel overwhelmed by the mental skills training process, but rest assured, the following chapters will provide mental skills information and mental drills that will allow you to become effective with mental skills training. Think of them as mental tools and as you work through this book, you will add mental tools to your mental toolbox. The main purpose of this chapter was to introduce you to mental skills training and provide evidence that it works. Enjoy the remaining chapters as you learn how to implement a systematic mental skills training program and develop specific mental training tools to take your performance to the next level.