

# GAME ON!

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- *Valuable lessons from our younger selves.*
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*"I get knocked down, but I get up again. You're never going to keep me down."*

- Chumbawamba

*Master your mental game & take control of your performance*

## ARE YOU TOUGH ENOUGH?

When the game is on the line do you fight for the win, or retreat to the locker room? If obstacles are thrown your way do you lie down in defeat, or welcome the challenge? Many athletes and coaches cite "mental toughness" as a key psychological component to achieving success in sport. The phrase "mental toughness" gets thrown around a lot – so what does it mean to be a Mentally Tough (MT) athlete? Here are some of the top attributes of iron

clad athletes and the tools you need to up your own MT quotient.



### **You believe in yourself**

You know exactly what you want to achieve and are committed to making it happen. In order to be successful in your sport,

you have to first believe in your ability to perform under any circumstances and achieve your highest potential. MT athletes have no doubt in their ability to accomplish their performance goals.

### MENTAL TOUGHNESS TOOL – Goal Setting

MT athletes know exactly what they want and exactly how to get it. Goal setting is the tool to help you create a vision of what you want to

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## KINDERGARTEN WISDOM

In 1989 Robert Fulghum published his philosophy about [valuable life lessons learned in kindergarten](#). I've added a few of my own to the list; some tried and true lessons from our younger years to help remind us of what is important in sport and life.

### **Try new things:**

Kindergartners are all about trying new things. (Recently, my 5-year-old nephew proudly proclaimed to me that he ate a worm!) As we get older we can get stuck in our habitual ways. If you hit a plateau or get stuck

in a rut, maybe it's time to color outside the lines. I'm not suggesting you eat a worm, but you may need to take a step back and try something new.

### **Have a sense of humor:**

An often touted statistic in popular media is that on average children laugh 350 times/day while adults laugh just 25. I haven't been able to find the research that backs this up, but I do know that kindergartners will laugh uncontrollably, and sometimes for no apparent reason. Having a sense of humor is

imperative to balancing out the pressures of training and competition; so, don't be afraid to laugh a little!

### **Be in the moment:**

When kindergartners are out at recess, they aren't thinking about how they screwed up trying to write the letter G during class. When they are writing the letter G, they're focused on the letter G; when they're sliding down the slide, they are focused on enjoying the slide. This valuable lesson is one that can have the greatest impact on sport and life.

## Training for Adversity

If you want to get good at dealing with any circumstances that come your way – don't leave it to chance, go out and practice.

**Scenario:** You've left gear behind and have to borrow it from someone else.

### **Practice with different gear**

Swap gear with a teammate and practice playing with different gear.

**Scenario:** You are about to go to a big event with lots of crowd noise and trash talk.

### **Practice with external distractions**

Recruit some folks to try and distract you as you train so you can develop your skill of focus and tuning-out distractions.

**Scenario:** Your game is in one hour and the weather report says it's 98° and rising.

### **Practice in all kinds of weather**

If you're a fair weathered athlete and will have competitions in un-fair weather, you need to follow the postman's credo and get out and train in any kind of weather.

## ARE YOU TOUGH ENOUGH, CON'T

accomplish with a plan for how to get there. (Check out the article "[Pedal Closer Towards Your Goals](#)" on my website for more specifics on goal setting.)

### **You can handle anything thrown your way**

There is no demand that you can't meet, no obstacle you can't overcome. In competition, a MT athlete is not defeated in the face of a setback. Optimal performance does not rely on perfect conditions. A MT athlete can quickly assess the situation and adapt to the new circumstances. MT athletes are able to focus on the task at hand and do what needs to be done in that moment, regardless of what's going on around them.

### MENTAL TOUGHNESS TOOL – *Simulation Training*

Imagine circumstances that might rattle your confidence or focus and try to create situations during training that will simulate those experiences. (Example –

If you're a triathlete afraid of people swimming on top of you during the swim, get some trusted friends to join you during your next open water training and have them swim close by and swim over you so you get used to that stimulus and are prepared for it when it happens during a race.) By incorporating simulation training you provide yourself the opportunity to practice dealing with setbacks successfully. Check out the sidebar for more examples of simulation training.



### **When you get knocked down, you get back up**

Your drive and dedication to your goals always

keeps you moving forward. MT athletes do not get sidelined when they make mistakes during competition. They quickly regain composure; keep their heads in the game and their focus in the moment. And when a MT athlete loses a game, they use the failures as feedback and carry what they learned into the next competition. Instead of the loss deterring from the goal, it pushes them to want it even more.

### MENTAL TOUGHNESS TOOL – *Reflection*

MT athletes can be angry or disappointed about a mistake or loss, but quickly move onto analyzing what happened in order to learn from it. Mistakes and losses are valuable sources of feedback. Be proactive at seeking out this feedback by reflecting on your performance after every competition and take what you've learned into the next event. (Check out the [Summer 2007 Game ON! issue](#) to get some valuable advice on using reflection.)

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