

GAME ON!

In this issue...

- *Making sense of those pre-performance nerves.*
- *Finding some external support to jump start your motivation.*
- *Inspirational people, books, and movies.*

"What's bigger than butterflies? A buzzard? I had a buzzard in my stomach."

-Allen Iverson
Pro basketball player

Master your mental game & take control of your performance

NERVES! Dealing with pre-performance anxiety

Anxiety is hardwired in us. It serves an important purpose in our lives, but sometimes it can spiral seemingly out of control. Anyone who has ever participated in a sport has felt those familiar butterflies in their stomach. Being nervous before an event is normal. However, being so nervous that you feel like the caterpillars in your stomach are transforming into flesh eating butterflies can become detrimental to

your performance.



For some folks, the sport that they love ends up causing them so much angst that they start to question if it's worth it.

Why do we get nervous before competition?

There are many reasons why people find themselves getting nervous before an event. Here are a few:

Importance of the event:

How you feel before a pre-season game may be different than how you feel before a game in the quarter-finals. How you feel before an "A" race may be different than how you feel before a "C" race.

Story continued page 2

FINDING INSPIRATION

The beginning of a new year is a natural time to reflect on your life and set new goals for yourself. Typically during this time there is a lot of excitement and renewed energy; your internal motivation is on overdrive! Other times we need a catalyst to get us going.

It's true that motivation has to come from within, but sometimes it needs a little prodding. Here are some ways to find that inspiration:

MUSIC: Music can have

a powerful impact on our emotions. Create your own inspirational music list. As you listen to music in your everyday life jot down the songs that make you move and make you smile no matter what mood you're in.

KIDS: Spend the afternoon playing with a three year old. Their energy and zest for life is amazing. A young child's determination to learn a new skill after countless mistakes is remarkable. In the world of toddlers it's

all about enjoying the moment and seeking out challenges.

STORIES: Stories of inspirational people and events inspire us. It reminds us of what is possible. (Check out the *Need Some Inspiration?* column for some great stories to choose from.) We are all capable of more than we realize and sometimes hearing about other's amazing feats helps us to remember that.

Need Some Inspiration?

Start by googling the stories of these amazing athletes. Then pick up an inspirational book or movie!

PEOPLE

Rick Hoyt

Team Type 1

Karen Smyers

Roger Bannister

Dawn Riley

BOOKS

Thinking Body,

Dancing Mind

Chungliang Al Huang
and Jerry Lynch

*The 7 Habits of
Highly Effective*

People

Stephen Covey

*Way of the
Peaceful Warrior*

Dan Millman

MOVIES

Miracle

Rudy

Murderball

Hoosiers

NERVES, CON'T

When the event holds more importance to us we tend to put more pressure on ourselves.

Comparing yourself to others:

Are you looking around at your competition and feeling like you don't stack up? Are you worried about how you're going to perform compared to the people around you? Comparing yourself to your teammates and competitors can fill you full of anxiety. You need to gauge your success based on YOUR goals and YOUR performance regardless of what anyone else does around you.

Over-identifying with the outcome of the event:

Sometimes you need to step outside of yourself and gain a little perspective. Your experience as an athlete is so much more than results. The outcome of one event doesn't define you as an athlete or as a person.

Reading into your symptoms:

Are you nervous or are

you excited? Sometimes it's a matter of interpretation. If you perceive your physiological symptoms as "bad", then when you feel butterflies you label yourself as being nervous. Changing your perception of those butterflies can help with your nerves. Decide right now that butterflies are a sign of your body getting excited and giving you energy to perform.



What to do about it on game day

Put yourself in check. Nerves are a combination of physical and mental symptoms so you need to work on both.

1st - CHECK your breathing

Rapid shallow breathing intensifies your feelings of anxiety. Try this – inhale

through your nose as you slowly count to four, pause and hold your breathe, and exhale out of your mouth counting to six. Take several deep breaths this way to slow your breathing down.

2nd - CHECK your thoughts

YOU control your thoughts. What you think is your choice. If you feel like your brain gets hijacked with negative thoughts, try this – on a 3x5 card write down 1 – 2 sentences on what you need to be thinking before an event (i.e. I am prepared and ready for my race. Bring it on.) What you say is up to you. If you feel like you can't control your thoughts then just pull out your card and read it!

The bottom line is that you aren't always going to feel exactly the way you want to feel going into an event. Nerves are a part of life. Instead of fighting against them, put them in check and make those butterflies work for you.

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