

IN-PSYCH FOR SPORTS: IMPRINTING THE IDEAL PERFORMANCE STATE

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Use all your senses in imaging the Ideal Performance State. Learn how to deal with competition anxiety, to recover from setbacks, to park distractions and refocus on your game plan for high performance and achievement.

PURPOSE: This session, like others in the series, borrows strongly from the well-researched capacities of imagery to guide subsequent behavior. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than in the field of athletic performance, where research and experience have shown superior output and precision from individuals and teams when accurate imagery is employed by athletes. The same principles apply just as readily to any other situation requiring excellence and consistency of results.

DESCRIPTION: The session begins simulating the competitive environment in which training, practice, and competition are likely to occur. The athlete uses a focusing tension-release imagery exercise "Sending the Numbers Away" to allow the mind to settle into the alpha zone (18-12 Hz). Then the user images The Ideal Performance State (IPS), a scene in which he/she performs perfectly, to the extent of expanding the limits of his/her ability. The experience should be beautiful and exciting.

A second scene deals with coping with difficulties, such as errors in execution, bad calls by the referee, or just plain bad luck. These factors call for adjustment and refocusing with a positive attitude. All problems are overcome with confidence and renewed dedication, ultimately ending with a strong finish. After this scene, the athlete can settle into even deeper into the theta state while the athlete reaffirms personal worth, deservedness, and confidence. The IPS is rehearsed once again with a sense of deep satisfaction and confidence, emphasizing smoothness, flow, and mastery.

Now the athlete is ready for the final phase, going quickly into the high alpha state. Now he/she can practice the IPS in this simulated competitive environment of higher arousal, finishing energized while hanging loose but precise, confident and "in the Zone." While listening to affirmations, the athlete returns to the outside world in the last 30 seconds of the session.

CUSTOMIZING FEATURES: The audiotape is especially helpful as a bridging cue from light and sound sessions at home or at the club which can be played discreetly on a Walkman™ on the bus, in the team van, or at the tournament site. This allows for maximum transfer of training and self-cueing where Sound and Light Entrainment Devices are too conspicuous or not permitted. The A-side of the tape features the "Ring on a String" imagery demonstration, discussing the theory of imagery, and the advantages of combining and programming mixtures of coping and mastery models of imaging, using as many senses as possible to increase the depth of neural imprinting. The B-side of the tape features the guided imagery experience, in which the IPS is practiced at increasingly realistic levels of activation.

EXTENDED APPLICATIONS: Obviously, the time required to execute the IPS in different sports may differ widely (cf. pistol shooting and running a marathon). Using the standard program, the user will have to improvise segments of the IPS to match the time-line of scenes presented in the session, whereas a specialized application tape would be more precise. Such tapes, customized to the sport (figure skating, tennis, golf, baseball) could be easily developed, with specialized polysynch bursts of energy and stimulation at the appropriate times in the desired movements. Still, these are at best only an approximation of the precision required by the individual athlete. Some degree of adaptation and flexibility will always be required. In addition, other programs can be offered to assist performance in other high performance contexts. Depending on the required level of activation and alertness required by the context, either this session or "The Room For Improvement" might be used as a basis for later customizing. Furthermore, a complete album of sport psychology topics is in the planning phase, including topics like activation control, learning a new skill, focusing, dealing with intimidation, parking distractions, precompetition planning, competition strategy, and emotional control for coaches.