



Providing information to individuals and teams seeking optimal performance

Finishing

In the March 14, 2010 finals of the SEC's men's basketball tournament, Mississippi State held a 3 point lead against Kentucky, the number 2 team in the nation, with only 8 seconds left in the game. Kentucky not only scored 3 points to tie the game (thanks to a layup by DeMarcus Cousins with time running out) and sent the game into overtime; they won the game 75-74 to earn their 26th SEC tournament title. For the win, Kentucky earned an automatic bid to the NCAA tournament and a number one seed. Mississippi State's reward? A number one seed in the NIT, considered by most teams to be a consolation tournament. In an interesting coincidence, a similar scenario including these same teams happened on February 16, 2010 and Kentucky won that game in overtime as well.

How many times have you either coached or played for a team that came from behind late to win a game? Coaches often refer to this as "finishing well." On the other hand, teams that have a lead late in the game and yet fail to win are often said to have "failed to finish." Another example of failing to finish in basketball is a player who makes a great defensive play to steal the ball and then misses a layup.

Finishing well is related to several mental skills including goal setting, attention management, effort, and self-talk. We will look at how each impacts the act of "finishing."

Goal Setting

In order to "finish well," you must remain aware of the purpose of the action, or set of actions. Is it to complete a layup? Is it to prevent your opponent from scoring? Is it to win a game? Each of these represents a goal that has been set.

In the March 2009 edition of the newsletter, we discussed the process of goal setting in some detail. In the case of finishing, goal setting helps the athlete/team to "finish

well" by directing the athlete's or team's actions, just like a game plan does. Keeping your goals in mind will help you remember what is important to attend to.

Attention Management

It is important that each athlete direct his or her full attention to what he or she is currently doing. This gives the athlete the best opportunity to "finish the task well." However, it is very easy to lose your focus during a competition. Depending on the sport, the competition may last anywhere from a few minutes to many days. Thus, paying attention throughout the competition can be challenging.

The most effective way for an athlete to learn to direct his or her full attention to what they are doing during a competition is to do this during practice. It is extremely easy to focus on a mistake made in the past. It is also extremely easy to focus on the action you are supposed to do next before you finish what you are currently doing, such as running before you catch the ball in football. I suggest focusing on what is important at the moment during practice in order to improve your ability to manage your attention during a game. See the October 2009 newsletter for more information about managing attention.

Now, I obviously cannot read minds but while watching the SEC basketball final, it looked to me like the Mississippi State players were simply waiting around for Kentucky to lose during the final seconds of the game. Kentucky, on the other hand, seemed to recognize that the game was not over yet and acted to do what they could to stay in the game.

Effort

As I have noted before, there are not many things over which you have control. However, the effort you put into both practice and competition is something over which you have absolute control.

Once you assume you know the outcome, you almost guarantee that you will "finish poorly." Remember, the body follows the mind. So, once you think, "we have this game won," it is only natural to back off on effort and you are much more likely to "limp in" to the finish. You may not lose but finishing strong is certainly not likely. On the other hand, once you think, "we cannot win," you have made this a virtual certainty. The June 2009 newsletter addresses the concept of effort more fully.

Self-Talk

As noted above, your internal dialogue has a large impact on your actions. You can use your self-talk to complement any of the other three mental skills described here to guide you towards a "good finish." Remind yourself about your goals. Direct yourself to attend to what is important now. Encourage yourself to put in maximum effort, regardless of the score. The March and June 2007 issues of the newsletter discuss self-talk in more detail.

In conclusion, the recipe for "finishing well" includes being aware of your goals for the activity in which you are involved, being fully attentive to what is important while being involved in that activity, putting in your full effort while being involved in that activity, and using your self-talk productively. Finishing well does not guarantee wins, but it does mean that you have done all you can to perform successfully!

Note: All of the newsletters referenced can be downloaded from the website.

For more information about this or any other topic related to mental skills or sport and performance psychology, contact your local sport psychologist.

Be sure to check out the new website. Your feedback is appreciated.

This bi-monthly publication is being offered to you free of charge. You may share this newsletter with others as long as it is distributed in its entirety. If you prefer not to receive a copy, either call 256-551-4479 or send an email to moncierj@uasomh.uab.edu. Use these same methods to be placed on the mailing list. All back issues of *Performance Enhancement News* can be downloaded at no charge at: www.monciersportpsychology.com.

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To schedule a sport psychology consultation with Dr. Moncier, call 256-551-4479. Questions regarding sport psychology services can be directed to Dr. Moncier via email at moncierj@uasomh.uab.edu. Further information about either sport psychology in general or Dr. Moncier's practice in particular can be found at: www.monciersportpsychology.com.

Announcement: UAB Sport Psychology's Summer Mental Toughness Boot Camp

Developing mental toughness is a process that is only now becoming more completely understood. UAB Sport Psychology has created a course to help athletes develop the skills consistent with the emerging literature regarding mental toughness.

This course focuses on helping the individual athlete develop self-awareness of mental strengths and areas needing more work. Additionally, participants will learn a variety of mental skills used by elite athletes in order to further develop their own mental toughness, such as controlling emotions, self-talk, and focus; managing energy; and using imagery as a performance tool. These skills form the basis of the individual athlete's pre-performance routines, regrouping plans, and general mental preparation strategies that will allow him or her to perform to the best of his or her abilities. Participants will also learn ways to incorporate mental toughness training into physical practices and their life in general in order to make the most out of both.

The course will start on June 22, 2010. It will meet on Tuesday nights for 10 weeks at UAB-Huntsville from 6:00-7:30 pm. The course will be limited to 25 athletes ages 15 and older. There will be homework between each class. At the end of the course, each participant will have a notebook that they can use to continue to guide them as they strengthen their mental toughness long after the class is over. For a more detailed description and for registration materials, go to www.monciersportpsychology.com and follow the "Mental Toughness Course" link. Registration ends June 11, 2010.

You can now hear Dr. Moncier on the radio on WUMP (730 AM or 103.9 FM) at 3:30 on Tuesday afternoons as he discusses the mental aspects of sport in relation to current events in the sports world during "The Johnny 'Ballpark' Franks Show." If you are not in the North Alabama area or do not have access to a radio at work, you can listen to the show by directing your computer's web browser to www.730ump.com and clicking on the "On Air Now" link at the upper right corner of the page.