



# Performance Enhancement News

UAB Sport Psychology

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*Providing information to individuals and teams seeking optimal performance*

## Keeping in Shape (Mentally) During the Off-Season

It is the end of the academic year and most high school and college sports are winding down. In addition, student athletes are finishing up their academic obligations and are preparing for the transition to “summer” mode. This mode may include taking summer classes, working at a summer job, vacationing with family, and/or, in the case of a graduating senior, preparing for the next career step (either college or job).

For athletes who will continue to compete in the fall, it is standard procedure to also include a physical conditioning program as part of the summer activities. Most of us have experienced the effects of taking an extended time off from exercise. In one study (Graves et al., 1988), participants who stopped training for 12 weeks lost 68% of the strength they had gained during a 10 to 18 week training program. Those participants who, instead, switched to a maintenance program consisting of regular but fewer training days per week maintained their strength gains. Thus, the benefits of maintaining physical conditioning during the off-season should be obvious: less time spent focusing on getting back into shape and more time spent improving your physical skills when official practice resumes.

Mental skills are no different from physical skills and the “use it or lose it” principle applies as well. Elements that will help you stay in good mental shape during the off-season include assessing or reassessing your mental skills strengths and weaknesses, goal reviewing and resetting, and adopting a productive mindset.

### Assess/Reassess

The self-assessment process was discussed in detail in the December 2006 issue of the newsletter. Briefly, this is the process of determining both the skills that are required to perform well at your position in your sport and how well-developed these skills are for you.

If you completed a self-assessment during the preseason last year, now is a great time to pull out the list and review what you (and others) identified as your relative strengths and weaknesses. Ignore the ratings for now. Instead, look at the skills you listed and re-rate your present skill level, again using the scale of 1-10 (with a rating of “1” indicating “needs a lot of work” and a rating of “10” indicating “fantastic!”).

Now compare your current self-assessment with your earlier one. If you specifically worked to improve your relative weaknesses, you should see an increase in your ratings on these skills. If you do not see improvement, more work is indicated.

**Note:** If you did not do a self-assessment last year, follow the instructions listed in the December 2006 newsletter in order to determine your relative strengths and weaknesses.

### Goal Reviewing/Resetting

This is also a great time to review any goals you set for the recently completed competitive season. As you review your goals, make sure to mark through any that were met. Highlight any that were not met.

Next, using your self-assessment, identify those mentally-based skills that were rated low. Examples of these might include self-talk, motivation, mental toughness, or handling pressure.

Your unmet goals and low-rated skills can form the foundation of your off-season goals. You can also add others that you (or your coach) think are important. Follow the instructions for setting up long and short term goals described in the March 2009 newsletter. Other issues of the newsletter can give you ideas on how to improve specific mental skills. Make sure to write down your goals and review them regularly throughout the off-season. If you meet a goal, mark through it. This shows that you are progressing. If you are not seeing

progress, it may mean that a particular goal is either too hard or too easy. Changing to goals of more moderate difficulty will help push you to improve.

### Adopting a Productive Mindset

Adopting a productive mindset includes making the correct choices, putting in the effort, and making a commitment to both of these.

**Making the correct choices** means keeping your goals in mind and acting in a way that helps you meet them. It may mean saying “no” to something that might be enjoyable in the short term but will either not help you meet your goals or, even worse, might move you farther away from meeting your goals. This includes sticking to a diet, avoiding substance abuse, and adhering to a practice schedule, including resting when appropriate.

**Effort** is one aspect of your life over which you have a lot of control over. A key question to ask yourself to determine if you are putting forth the appropriate effort is, “Are you practicing like you want to play, even during the off-season?”

Finally, you have put in the effort to set up an off-season physical and mental training program. Being **committed** refers to having the will and determination to follow through with the program. It is up to you, and only you, to follow through. Best wishes!

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

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

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**The next Mental Toughness Boot Camp starts on June 22!**

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](mailto: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](http://www.monciersportpsychology.com).

**Dr. Jim Moncier** is a licensed psychologist in Alabama and Florida. He is an assistant professor of Psychiatry and Family Medicine at the University of Alabama School of Medicine, Huntsville Campus, a Certified Consultant of the Association for Applied Sport Psychology, and a member of Division 47 (Exercise and Sport Psychology) of the American Psychological Association. His sport psychology practice includes work with athletes, coaches, and teams in junior high, high school, collegiate, and professional sports such as baseball,

basketball, competitive cheerleading, football, golf, rowing, soccer, softball, swimming, tennis, track, triathlon, volleyball, and wrestling.

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](mailto: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](http://www.monciersportpsychology.com).

## Reference

Graves, JE, Pollock, ML, Leggett, SH, Braith, RW, Carpenter, DM, & Bishop, LE. (1988). Effect of reduced training frequency on muscular strength. *International Journal of Sports Medicine*, 9, 316-319. As reported in Wilmore, JH, & Costill, DL. (1999). *Physiology of Sport and Exercise* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

## 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](http://www.monciersportpsychology.com) and follow the "Mental Toughness Boot Camp" link under the Services menu. Registration ends June 11, 2010. **We are offering a discount for three or more participants from the same team or school who register at the same time. See the website for details.**

You can now hear Dr. Moncier on the radio on WUMP (730 AM or 103.9 FM) at 3:30 on Tuesday afternoons 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](http://www.730ump.com) and clicking on the "On Air Now" link at the upper right corner of the page.