

Vol 2, Issue 11: The Big Game

The Big Game

It's November in Texas, which means two things: A break from the heat and HS playoffs for Fall sports. Just as a change in the weather can create different practice conditions, playing in Regional, District or State level championships can generate new challenges for coaches and players. Each game now takes on new meaning...going home for the season. The media scrutiny also is more intense, particularly as you win in earlier rounds and advance to the state finals.

Crowds are larger, anxiety and pressure is magnified, and winning takes on an even bigger focus.

So, how do you and your team succeed in this pressure-cooker? There are several keys to success when playoff pressure arrives. First, maintain your regular physical training program and help minimize external distractions so your athletes can maintain their focus and intensity. Second, if possible, simulate the competition environment in practice to desensitize the players to what they will face in the game/match. Third, although you will adjust your game plan to fit your upcoming opponent, minimize teaching/learning new elements, plays or techniques. Instead, focus on what you have done all season and what is well-learned by your players. Fourth, talk with your coaches and team about the anxiety they may feel in relation to game/match and put in place strategies for successfully coping with any anxiety or lack of focus that may occur. Fifth, follow your routine on game day to help you feel comfortable and ready to compete or coach. Lastly, but maybe most importantly, have fun...you may only get one chance to play on the big stage so make it fun.

At the Center for Sport Psychology and Performance Excellence at the University of North Texas, we have a staff of trained consultants who are committed to help you and your team to continue the success you had during the regular season into the postseason by managing anxiety, working proactively to simulate highly competitive environments in practice, and increasing the teams ability to feel comfortable with the pressure of the playoffs. If you would like more information or would like to learn how we could assist your team, contact us at 940-369-7767 or sportpsych@unt.edu, or visit our website at www.sportpsych.unt.edu. We leave with our sport quote of the week and our wishes for your success this postseason:

“There’s no shoulda, coulda, or woulda. If you shoulda and coulda, you woulda.”

-Pat Riley