

### **Mental Toughness**

There are six seconds left and the score is tied. One of your athletes has the final chance to win the game. Will she be able to handle her nerves, calm her breathing and make the shot? Or will the anxiety and pressure of the moment cause him to fail to score the needed points? Many athletes, such as Brandi Chastain, Martin Gramatica, Roger Federer, and Tiger Woods, respond consistently in these moments. What distinguishes these and other athletes who are able to perform under pressure? The simple answer – mental toughness.

But what is mental toughness and what does it take to be mentally tough? Research has identified that confidence and motivation are a couple of the essential components to mental toughness. Confidence is a belief in one's ability to succeed, and you build it through preparation...both physical and psychological. Kicking field goal after field goal or putting one ball after another is an important and necessary way to refine (and make automatic) the motor movements required to perform the physical task. To build the confidence, though, athletes need to practice within the pressured situations they may face in competition. Whether through actual simulations in practices where athletes are put under pressure and expected to perform or mental imagery where athletes see themselves performing successfully and overcoming the pressures of the moment, the key is giving them practice opportunities to experience and handle the stress. Through such practice, athletes can develop the confidence they need to perform successfully in the moment of an important competition.

Motivation is mainly an internal drive for success, but it can be built through goal setting and external rewards. The motivation to succeed and to overcome setbacks is paramount in sporting environments. The reality of sport is that you will not make every shot, complete every pass, or win every tilt, so one must continue to strive for success. Gramatica could have been content with being out of football, but he was determined to win a job and become successful again. It is easy to kick a couple of field goals or hit a couple of balls at a driving range and then quit. It takes determination to become consistently successful as the aforementioned athletes have done.

At the Center for Sport Psychology and Performance Excellence, we have a staff of sport consultants who will work with you, your team, and your athletes to become mentally tough and rise to the occasion in sport and life. For more information about how to incorporate our services, contact us at 940-369-7767 or [sportpsych@unt.edu](mailto:sportpsych@unt.edu). For more information about the Center, check out our website at [www.sportpsych.unt.edu](http://www.sportpsych.unt.edu). As always, we leave you with our sport quote of the week:

“Every great athlete has fallen short at some point. Great athletes become great because they refuse to let their setbacks derail them from their determined quest to be the best.”

-Dan Gable, World and Olympic gold medal wrestler and one of the most successful wrestling coaches in the United States