

Vol 2, Issue 3: The Home Field Advantage

The Home Field Advantage

The home field advantage—fact or fiction? We often see this idea of defending your home turf in sports and it can even be traced to battles and struggles during war in our history books. In football this weekend, 12 of 16 NFL games and 5 of the 7 “ESPN Separation Saturday” college football games were won by the home team. In the MLB the top 8 playoff contenders from both leagues have a combined 61.2% winning percentage at home. In most team sports, typically half of a team’s games are played at home and the emphasis on winning at home is often much greater than winning on the road. Research shows that home teams in various sports win between 53% (baseball) and 69% (soccer) of their home games during the regular season. These statistics shift some in playoff situations.

So an important question is, does a team maintain or build their home court or field advantage?

Here are some suggestions:

Instilling a sense of pride and ownership about their home stadium is important and that can often start early on in an athlete’s career at his or her home turf, such as through helping maintain the field or learning the traditions of the arena.

At home, a team has a great opportunity to establish pre-game routines that they can perform the same way each game to make them as comfortable and confident as possible.

The design of athletic facilities, if within your control, can even be a helpful force. Creating smaller venues for your sport can improve the advantage by making the crowd tighter and possibly even closer to the field of play. Some universities have even painted opposing locker rooms aversive colors in order to throw off or irritate visiting opponents.

On the other side of the field, the reality is that all teams play on the road and sometimes can win up to 50% or more of those contests. For example, during week 1 of the NFL season an astounding 11 of 16 road teams won, including three road teams shutting out their home team opponent. So, an equally important question is, how does a team overcome a home advantage when playing on the road? Here are some suggestions:

Make the practice environment similar to the competitive situation in which the athletes are about to perform. Doing so can help build composure, focus, and discipline. If available, use stadium sound systems to pump in crowd noise and hostile crowd noise so that your athletes can become used to hearing the noise, which will help them adapt to it during the game.

Whenever possible, travel early to your road games. It is helpful for a team to be to “walk the field” or the court and develop a comfort with the competitive venue so they can plan for ways to avoid miscues.

A final mental key to winning on the road is to work to maintain the same pre-game routine as you do at home. Pre-game routines help an athlete focus and reduce tension or nerves that may be present before a big road game thus allowing him or her to play at an optimal level.

At the Center for Sport Psychology and Performance Excellence we have a staff of highly trained consultants who are committed to help athletes, coaches and teams achieve their performance goals through building pride, enhancing composure and focus or creating pre-game routines. For more information about our services and how we can work with you and/or your team, contact us at (940) 369-SPORT (7767). Or you can visit our website and send us an email at www.sportpsych.unt.edu In closing, we leave you with the sport quote of the week:

“Obstacles don’t have to stop you. If you run into a wall, don't turn around and give up. Figure out how to climb it, go through it, or work around it.” – Michael Jordan