

SELF CONFIDENCE

Unlock the Power of Your Mind

Chapter IV – SELF-CONFIDENCE

Sports psychology studies and anecdotal reports from winning athletes confirm that confidence is crucial for athletic success. Specifically, self-confidence is a strong belief in one's skills, preparation, and abilities. Confidence in tough situation is the mark of a great athlete, regardless of sport. In order to be successful, you must believe that you can be successful.

True confidence is a hard-earned trait. Gold legend Jack Nicklaus built his confidence through proper preparation, particularly for the four major tournaments a year. While he won a record – 18 professional major championships, he also had 19 runner-up finishes and 9 third place finishes – in 46 major tournaments, he was still in the top three on Sunday.

In an interview after winning a major championship, Nicklaus remarked, “As long as I’m prepared, I always expect to win.” Demonstrated performances (reflecting on previous successes and high points) and proper preparation (in terms of quality and quantity) are the two primary ways to gain confidence for competition.

To paraphrase sprinter Maurice Greene, a onetime world record holder in the 100 meters, train like you are No. 2 (train your talents) but compete like you are No. 1 (trust your talents.) On game day/race day, compete confidently by emphasizing your skills and strengths, drawing from past successes, and appreciating the encouragement from your coaches and teammates. Emphasize your strengths and your opponents’ weaknesses – not vice versa.



Remember to identify similarities between the challenge at the moment and previous situations in which you have excelled or surpassed your expectations. Tell yourself, “I’ve done this before and I can do it now.” Focus on your performance, not on unwanted outcomes.

To perform at your highest level, you must understand the importance of a long-term memory for success and a short-term memory (selective amnesia) for failure. Every athlete fails, but you

cannot dwell on your failures. Instead, focus on the positive experiences and keep confidently moving forward.

Complacency is often the culprit when an athlete or team blows a big lead or loses to an “inferior” opponent (who obviously did not see themselves as inferior.) Extremely high confidence is never the problem, provided that you are continuously working hard and intelligently in training to become the best athlete you can be, and you have an underlying will to win during competition. You can hate to lose, but you can’t be afraid to lose. Confidence without complacency keeps you on target when you are playing well and winning.

Several self-reflection questions are included here, based on the pioneering work on the topic of self-efficacy (a specific strength of belief) by Stanford psychologist Dr. Albert Bandura beginning in the mid-1970’s. These questions are designed to raise your confidence as you review accomplishments, recall positive feedback, resolve to mirror, and model your athletic heroes, and listen to reminders of your capabilities.



Photo: “A Leap of Faith” – Courtesy: Doug Lewis and ELITEAM Camp

Take a note from the chapter on Goal Setting, write these questions down and write down your answers. You should be getting a sense of how everything works together and compliments each other to make you a better mental athlete.

- 1.** What has been the biggest challenge to date that you have overcome in your sport, and how did you overcome it? Examples include bouncing back from a major injury, busting out of a slump, or completing your first marathon or triathlon.
 - Answer:
- 2.** Describe your greatest sports performance to date. Spend a few minutes reliving the glory and magic moments from this performance in vivid color. (Remember the chapter on Imagery?) What helped you make it over the top? What were your thoughts and feeling during the game, match, or race?

● Answer:

3. What are three of your signature strengths or attributes as an athlete? Be honest, but don't be modest in answering this question. Examples include work ethic, mental toughness, and focus.

1.
2.
3.

4. What are three compliments you have received from others that made you feel really good about yourself? Examples include a coach describing you as the hardest worker on the team, opponents saying you were their toughest competition, or a teammate calling you a warrior on the field, court, or slope.

1.
2.
3.

5. Who in your life wouldn't be surprised to see you overcome the challenge before you now and/or accomplish your biggest goal? Examples include your mother, father, sibling, grandparents, coach, teammate, or friend.

● Answer:

6. What are three awards or accomplishments that you have earned? Examples include an individual or team trophy, and athletic scholarship, or a personal best in your performance.

1.
2.
3.

7. Identify three athletic heroes or role models (currently or from childhood) that you can mirror or mimic when you need a confidence boost during a challenging situation. Perhaps your favorite player battled through on-the-field adversity by showing tremendous resolve when he or she played. Remember, if you can spot the greatness in others, you already have some of that greatness in yourself.

1.
2.
3.



You must **expect great things of yourself...**
before you can do them.

~~ Michael Jordan ~~

