



Unlock the Power of Your Mind

Chapter IX – ENJOYMENT

Imagine the following scenario: You are the quarterback and your team are down 16-13 in the Super Bowl. The ball is on your 8-yard line with only 3 minutes 10 seconds remain on the clock. What do you say to your team in the huddle? This is the exact same situation that Joe Montana faced when his San Francisco 49ers played the Cincinnati Bengals in Super Bowl XXIII. He decided to alleviate stress and pressure to the stadium crowd and said, “Hey, isn’t that John Candy?”

For the remainder of the game, the 49ers proceeded to drive down the field for the winning touchdown, scoring with 34 seconds left to play. It was clutch performances such as this that earned Montana the nickname “Joe Cool.”

Another classic story about the necessity of humor in sports comes from professional tennis. Vitas Gerulaitis, one of the top male tennis players during the late 1970’s and early 1980’s, was ranked as high as number three in the world in 1978. Despite his ability, Gerulaitis had been beaten by Jimmy Connors a hard-to-swallow 16 times straight. After finally breaking through and defeating Connors in 1980, Gerulaitis declared, “And let that be a lesson to you all. Nobody beats Vitas

Gerulaitis seventeen times in a row!” Clearly, Gerulaitis was able to maintain his confidence and laugh at the situation despite the losing streak against Connors.

Steffi Graf, renowned as one of the greatest female tennis players in history, had a memorable moment during the 1996 Wimbledon semifinal against Kimiko Date.



During a tense part of the match, as she readied to serve a spectator yelled out, “Steffi, will you marry me?” As the fans in the stadium burst into laughter, she smiled and yelled back, “How much money do you have?”

While her disposition was typically stoic, her playful response to the comical court proposal helped lighten the mood and release tension. Graf went on to win the match and then defeat Arantxa Sanchez Vicario for the title.

There’s great truth in the popular phrase that “humor is the best medicine,” or in saying that laughter is “internal jogging.” A good sense of humor is important for peak performance, as well as health and happiness. Humor is often misinterpreted in sports as being a sign of distraction or not caring about one’s performance. However, finding humor in difficult situation is often the best way to reduce unnecessary stress and increase motivation.



A touch of humor at the right time keeps things from becoming too tense. This may help to explain why military personnel, police officers, and firefighters are often described as having sufficiently developed senses of humor. Lieutenant General Chest Puller, the most decorated marine in U.S. history, told his soldiers, “We’re surrounded. That simplifies the problem!” A good laugh can reduce stress, boost performance, and improve mood.

What does an umpire say to begin a game of baseball? He or she shouts, “Play ball!” not “Work ball!” There is a simple and straightforward reason behind this fact. Sports are meant to be played and enjoyed, enhanced by fun and humor whenever possible. There is no doubt that this shared laughter can form instant and long-lasting bonds among teammates, if stories and jokes are not mean-spirited.

Here are some practical strategies for enhancing your sense of humor and finding greater enjoyment in your sport:

- Have teammates with whom you share jokes and funny stories
- Watch humor – comedy movies, TV sitcoms, and stand-up comics
- Read humor – comics, funny books, satirical websites (e.g., the Onion)
- Utilize props – flush away bad performances with a miniature toy toilet that you keep in your locker/hill bag/car.

Bottom line: The more enjoyable the experience, the better your performance will be. Skip Bertman coached the LSU Tigers baseball team to five NCAA titles from 1984 to 2001. He said, “It is critical to not let the pressure of competition become greater than the pleasure of competition.” To move forward, seek out things to love about your sport and reasons to enjoy it.

Do not let the **pressure** of competition...
become greater than the **pleasure** of competition.