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Sport Psychology Meets Mindfulness
Dr. Alex Diaz addressing Byram Hills
High School student-athletes
November 30th, 2017



A pleasure to have met Annika Sorenstam.



How to Bounce Back after Defeat

During Super Bowl 2017, we witnessed the New England Patriots being down by 25 points. As improbable as it was, they scored 19 points in the fourth quarter, including a couple of 2-point conversions, to beat the Atlanta Falcons 34-28 in overtime.

In 1993, then world's No. 1 tennis player, Monica Seles, was stabbed in the back, which led to a 2-year physical and emotional rehabilitation. In 1995, in her first tournament back, she wins the Canadian Open, followed by winning the Australian Open in 1996 and 19 single tournaments before retiring in 2008.

We all know stories of remarkable individuals who, despite all odds, demonstrated supreme mental toughness to bounce back displaying a mindset to never give up. What makes them apart from others? How were these individuals able to bounce back? And, what can we learn from their experiences?

Positive Mindset

Athletes do not approach their games wanting to fail or perform below their skills. However, they tend to underperform when their minds get distracted by negative thoughts or by circumstances that distract their minds. A positive mindset is like having control at the wheel. It allows them to take full charge of where they need to put their attention to while navigating around the obstacles that come along the way. Rather than being affected by distractions, athletes constantly shifts their attention into actions that will

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guide them to achieve their goals.

By no means their minds will not get distracted. On the contrary, they understand that distractions are bound to happen. Unfavorable referee calls, unexpected comeback from the opponent, and falling behind early in the game are situations that athletes have not control over. However, a positive mindset accepts these situations as part of the game by just focusing on controlling what is controllable.

Also, a positive mindset relieves athletes from carrying the additional pressure of needing to do well. All the preparation leading to the performance is behind. By fully trusting in a positive mindset, it allows athletes to face competition and all its challenges head on rather than carrying on their shoulders the unrealistic expectation of having to win or else. Instead, it allows athletes to trust in their skills, be more focused, and fully present.



Resilience

Resilience is seeing the glass half full rather than half empty. Athletes know that success is achieved by embracing all the experiences that take place along the way. Just like they fully enjoy celebrating winning performances, they also embrace failing. They understand the greatest source of knowledge comes from those experiences where they did not achieve their goals. Instead, they use those opportunities to analyze what happened in order to make necessary changes that will give them a greater opportunity to achieve success next time. Each opportunity is food for thought.



Success does not happen while navigating on a straight line. Instead, it is an up and down road that brings challenges along the way. Some of those challenges will test your mind, body, skills, stamina, commitment, and perseverance. Along the way, disappointments will be experienced. As disappointing as it is to achieve below expectations, top performers shift their focus to capitalize on

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strength and improve on their weaknesses. In so doing, they are true to themselves, which may lead to the realization that changes need to be made to elevate their game.

Resilience as an adaptation game. Each time a realistic goal is set, set your mind to achieve it. Put your full commitment and trust to achieve such a goal. If it is not achieved, rather than punishing yourself, take the time to understand you. Be honest with what you need to change and commit to making those changes next time. As Teddy Roosevelt once said, "courage is not having the strength to go on; it is going on when you don't have the strength."

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"It always seems impossible until it's done."
Nelson Mandela



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Have a wonderful holiday season,



Alex Diaz, Ph. D.
Sports Mental Edge TM Sports Psychology Consultant Certified Performing
Edge Coaching
Professional WWW.SPORTSMENTALEDGE.COM
68 Main Street, Suite 340
Tuckahoe, NY 10707
(914) 793-9719