



# Winter 2016

## SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS:

3-talk class on Sport Psychology at the [Scarsdale Adult School](#) on March 15-22-29.

### [Rye High School \(Female Team\) and St. Luke's Varsity Team \(Male and Female\).](#)

The female varsity squash team for Rye High School and the male and female varsity squash teams from St. Luke's School in New Canaan have included my sport psychology services to prepare them for U.S. High School Team Squash Championships to be played in February. I am super excited to participate in the growth of this sport and raise their mental toughness for the upcoming tournament and beyond.

Also, I obtained DISC certification, which is a behavioral assessment tool for the understanding of personality traits. It not only facilitates self-knowledge, but more importantly, helps to understand somebody else's in order to improve cohesiveness and lessen of tension.

## SPEAKING AT [THE SPORTS INJURY SYMPOSIUM](#): INFORMATION BELOW



## How Sport Psychology Can Improve Your Game

How many times have we seen elite athletes making unexpected mistakes when under pressure? Why is it that playing the last point of a tennis match feels so different than playing the first one? How come a golf swing is so free of thoughts and trusting in the driving range, but tentative when on the golf course? Regardless of how good we are at any sport, we intend to do our best based on our given talent and expertise. Whether you compete to win or to have fun, there is an inherent emotional component that goes beyond our skill and knowledge of the game. When we compete, there is a desire and hope that the achieved outcome proves our true talent.



However, when a desired outcome is on the line, our talent alone may not necessarily prove our worth. Emotions play a huge role in performance. So much so that elite athletes come to understand that to consistently achieve their best, they need to incorporate skills that will help them manage typical emotional pressure situations that are an integral part of competition.

Sport psychology is normally synonymous with helping athletes achieve their peak performance. However, its scope goes beyond that. It includes supporting coach-athlete relationships and addressing a variety of performance symptoms, such as: eating

PRESENTING THE 1ST ANNUAL

**[INJURY EMERGENCY PLAN FOR PARENTS OF AN ATHLETE](#)**

**SPORTS INJURY SYMPOSIUM**

**MARCH 7, 2016**  
(SNOW DATE MARCH 14TH)

**7:00 - 8:30PM**

**PLEASANTVILLE HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM**

**[Panel of Healthcare Experts:](#)**  
Orthopedic Surgeon, Sports Medicine Specialist, Sports Psychologist, Pediatrician, Doctor of Physical Therapy, and Certified Athletic Trainer

**[Topics:](#)**  
Injury Emergency Plan, Managing Injuries, Levels of Injuries, Student Athlete Wellness, and Questions & Answers

disorders, anger management, and substance abuse. It also conducts research to better understand triggers that lead to performance improvement.

There are typically three different mental strategies that athletes learn to use to help them navigate pressure situations: self-talk, breathing relaxation, and imagery.

### Self-Talk

It refers to the use of powered words for the purpose of generating self-motivation, increasing focus, breaking bad habits and enhancing confidence. Powered words are positive short expressions expressed in the present tense that are easy to remember

and are intended to generate positive momentum. The use of powered words serves to re-direct thoughts so athletes remain focused on the task at hand rather than being overly concerned with a prior or future event. Because thoughts are not isolated from emotions, they lead to emotional responses that can either increase focus or create distractions.



Athletes may approach a game having negative or positive thoughts even before competition starts. The athlete may be facing a known opponent and is already feeling optimistic or pessimistic; he/she may have fearful thoughts about losing as he/she wants to win in order to move up in his/her rankings. There are limitless counts of thoughts that cross the athlete's mind at any moment. The key is to be aware of those thoughts and make sure that positive ones are repeated. Some of the most common self-talk words are: let's go, strong and powerful, now, effortless speed or easy does it.

Some athletes claim that negative self-talk can enhance performance. This technique may be effective if only used on a limited basis as it will eventually undermine the athlete's confidence. It was also found that Asian athletes tend to use more negative self-talk than European athletes. Cultural background may play a role on self-talk effectiveness as its interpretation may be more important than the nature or content of the self-talk per say.

### Breathing relaxation

The quality of our breathing is immediately affected by our emotions. If the athlete approaches a nervous situation, the breathing will speed up; if the athlete feels fear, the breath will slow down. The breath will immediately respond to the environment. In fact, the breathing will respond quicker than our thoughts. Hence, it is important that awareness is placed to how the athlete is breathing.

Breathing in and holding your breath increases muscle tension whereas breathing out decreases it. Learning proper breathing can surely help athlete release tension, especially is they are performing a physically rigorous exercise. It is quite common that basketball players take a deep exhale right before shooting a free throw. It helps them release any extra tension that their bodies may be holding in.

Diaphragm breathing relaxation is one of the most common exercises for the purpose of regulating emotions and breathing patterns. The exercise consists in inhaling through our nose while noticing how our belly expands outwards. Then, exhale through the nose and repeat the process again. The key is to bring awareness of the breathing pattern and, if necessary, make quick adjustments to make sure it is done by relaxing the diaphragm. Under pressure situations, it is very common that the breathing will change. However, diaphragm breathing is

connected to a nervous system that triggers calmness, hence it is quite useful and practical for any athlete to know how to use.

### Imagery

Imagery is bringing to mind a picture of an ideal performance and see it to its completion in order to mentally program the sought after result athletes want to accomplish. The brain has a way of directing physiological and biological responses by visualizing it. Some professionals call it mental rehearsal. In essence, the brain has the capacity to respond to what it is being instructed to do if it is done on a repeated basis and having complete trust.



Imagery is commonly used by skier and golfers. Skiers run through their minds the visual image of how exactly their bodies will react as they approach and exit each gate. They feel it in their bodies, legs, arms, shoulders; they feel their heart beat pumping a bit faster as if they were really racing. By imagining the race, the body is mentally rehearsing each move and will become more responsive by the time the race takes place. Jack Nicklaus was very committed to visualizing each one of his shots. He pictured the exact trajectory of the ball and imagined how his body would move to execute such a shot.

Imagery is a very powerful mental strategy. It provides a great source of confidence, self-motivation and high self-esteem. It elevates the athletes' self-belief and improvement in concentration. Commitment toward practicing it is very important, but even more important is having the awareness that, if fear or self-doubt creep in, the positive image stays until the action is positively and successfully done.

Sport psychology has wonderful benefits to help athletes reach their peak performance. It brings mental coping skills to help them manage pressure situations so they can successfully navigate stressors. Strategies learned in sport psychology are also very practical as life skills. Concentration, mental toughness, focus and tenacity are attributes that go beyond athleticism. It also wonderfully serves in academics, work, and family life. A truly useful skill to learn!



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