

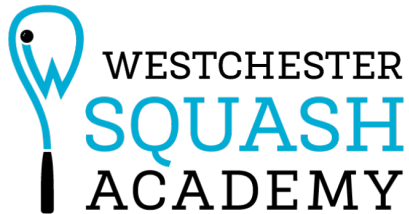
Sports Mental Edge Winter Newsletter 2019

Upcoming Talks With Partners:



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Presenting:

Family Institute of Westchester
on Sport Psychology

Applying Sport Psychology Tools from a
Family Systems Perspective

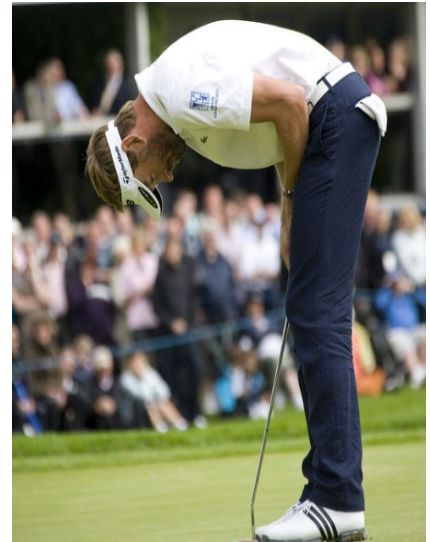
April 26, 2019 • 9:30am - 12:30pm
Fee: \$95 | FIW Alumni: \$85
CEU's: 3

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Choking

When we compete in highly pressured situations, emotions can create havoc to our learned skills and leaves us under-performing when it really matters. We can easily point out to the exact moment when choking occurs, but does missing a free-throw, penalty kick, or a 3-foot putt for birdie mean that those emotions suddenly showed up or have they been felt over time, but we ignored the warning signals?

Choking is more often than not the result of a process leading to under-performing than an isolated missed execution. Everybody misses free throws, penalty kicks, or short putts. And, emotions do not just show up all of the sudden. Our thoughts regarding the upcoming competition, our expectations, somebody else's expectations, importance of the game, and past experiences are all factors that influence performance. How we come mentally prepared to compete can greatly influence on how we perform when the emotions of the game are at its highest level.



John McEnroe said it best: "When it comes to choking, the bottom line is that everyone does it. The question isn't whether you choke or not, but how -when you choke- you are going to handle it. Choking is a big part of every sport, and part of being a champion is being able to cope with it better than everyone else." (Goffi, 1984, pp 61-62).

As competition is about to start, the heart beat speeds up, muscles tense, and the breathing accelerates. What we think about the competition concurs with an immediate physiological reaction. Thoughts and body felt sense responses go hand-in-hand. It is a

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human response, not an individual response. We all go through the same organic experience. Maybe, for some individuals, the felt sense responses are less pronounced than for others. Regardless of your personal experience, negating, minimizing, or pretending that "I am fine" will only exacerbate the sensations. Unless these experiences are well managed, emotions will show up when the game is on the line and, by then, it will be too late. The inability to cope with competitive emotions will lead to loss of focus, increased muscle tension, physical illness (throwing up) to later lamenting not being able to show your true talents.

One of the ways to enhance your ability to manage emotions is by paying close attention to what you can vs. cannot manage. If emphasis is placed on meeting past successful results, then such expectations will only increase tension as past experiences do not dictate how you are performing right now. It may provide information to help you design your strategy, but it will not execute present tasks. For example, a tennis player who easily beat an opponent in their last match will be mistaken to overly rely on such an outcome to minimize his/her own preparation. If the opponent made significant improvements and you came in unprepared, when the game is on the line, pressure will tense your muscles and increase the chances of making mistakes.



Also, team sports add pressure as the thought of not wanting to let teammates down often enhances self-pressure. It is important to have team meetings to talk about the pressure of wanting to do well and the fear of not wanting to let teammates down. It is vital that teammates feel the support of one another to strengthen team spirit. Fear concerns are in everybody's mind. We tend to believe we are the only ones who have these concerns, but it is

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often a common feeling that everybody has. Fearful thoughts and stressful feelings can easily remain hidden only to come up to the surface when the pressure is on.

Another good mental preparation happens on the night before competition. Going to bed early, imagining all possible competitive scenarios and creating mental rehearsals on how to overcome those situations, including having success and experiencing a loss, practicing breathing relaxation, and remaining positive are all mental tools that foster readiness.

We only have control over our own thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. It is very easy to get distracted by what others are saying, bad weather conditions, unfair referee calls, and the opponent's untimely good luck. Bring your attention to what you can control and embrace the process. If it was a successful experience, then celebrate it and remain focused. If it was an unsuccessful experience, then accept it as such without remaining overly emotionally attached and use a cue signal that fosters re-focusing.

To Parents: they can also serve as emotion regulators by reminding game strategies, focusing on variables that the athlete can control, such as positive talk, breathing relaxation, mental rehearsal, and cheering for all his/her efforts. It builds internal trust and confidence. On the other hand, focusing on winning, saying that his/her child is the best, or yelling when an error is made will increase pressure. Learning comes from making constant adjustment. The more parents support the athlete's ability to trust in their skills and learn from mistakes, the more likely the athlete will trust in his/her self-beliefs.