



## MENTAL ROUTINES

A mental routine helps you organise a consistent and systematic psych-up period before a race or game, without becoming psyched-out.

Most athletes have a standard warm-up they go through before competing that typically includes stretching, running, drills and tactical practice. A similar approach should be taken with mental preparation. An athlete should have specific thoughts, words, images and feelings leading up to a competition to optimally prepare the mind for top performance.

### WHY ARE MENTAL ROUTINES IMPORTANT TO PERFORMANCE?

Having mental routines can help you to:

- > **get 'in the zone'** – the main purpose of a mental routine is to get you into the right mindset
- > **increase your confidence** – when you are able to see and feel past and future successes as part of your mental preparation, you feel more in control and confident
- > **control your mental energy** – it is important to manage your mental energy so that you are not too flat or too energised. During preparation, you can listen to certain songs on your iPod to get energised about racing or imagine a relaxing scene to slow your thoughts
- > **narrow your focus** – technical cues ('explode off the blocks', 'keep elbow high') can be integrated into your routine to direct your attention towards the things you can control
- > **create certainty** – a mental routine can be a 'security blanket', something to turn to in the stressful moments leading up to the competition. It brings consistency to your preparation and performance.



## HOW DO MENTAL ROUTINES WORK?

- 1 The **first step** is to determine what mindset you want. That is, what mindset gives you the best performance. You can work this out by reflecting on your best and worst performances in the past.
- 2 The **second step** is to decide on what strategies will help you to create your ideal mindset on competition day.
- 3 The **third step** is to design a competition routine that incorporates your physical and mental strategies. This routine may start the night before the competition and continue until the end of the competition day.

## OTHER STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING COMPETITION

- > Be aware of expectations (yours and others) and your emotional responses to these expectations.
- > Set challenging but realistic goals for yourself in order to maintain optimal motivation and performance.
- > Talk with your parents/family, friends, partner, etc., about how they can best support you leading into and during competition.
- > Draw on the experiences of other athletes and talk to individuals who have negotiated similar competitions and preparations in the past.
- > Stay positive, block negative thoughts and believe that you have the ability/resources to meet the challenge you face. These strategies all help to create the self-belief and confidence that form the bedrock of your performance.

## TAKE ACTION

To further develop this skill, contact your performance psychologist or the AIS Performance Psychology department.