



CONCENTRATION

Concentrating on the right things at the right time is one of the most important skills an athlete can possess. All athletes recognise that they have difficulties concentrating for the duration of a performance or at specific times.

Difficulties concentrating are usually due to distractions. Rather than concentrating on appropriate cues, athletes become distracted by thoughts, emotions and other events. These distractions can be both internal and external

INTERNAL DISTRACTERS (THOUGHTS, WORRIES AND CONCERNS)

- > **Living in the past** – worrying about what just happened (especially mistakes).
- > **Living in the future** – thinking about results, outcomes and consequences.
- > **Self-talk** – especially when it is negative.
- > **Arousal levels and anxiety** – high arousal and anxiety can narrow your attentional field (that is, tunnel vision) and decrease environmental scanning. Alternatively, low arousal can cause a broadening in your attentional field and a focus on inappropriate cues.
- > **Fatigue** – focus requires effort, so if you are feeling fatigued it can sometimes be difficult to find the energy required to maintain your focus.

EXTERNAL DISTRACTERS

- > **Visual distracters** – crowd, competitors, scoreboards, cameras, etc.
- > **Auditory distracters** – talking, laughing, traffic, mobile phones, etc.
- > **Gamesmanship** – sledging, trash-talk.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING CONCENTRATION

Attention control and concentration are skills that can be improved and worked on just like a physical skill. There are a number of sport and non-sport related strategies and exercises that can be used to assist you in enhancing your attention and concentration skills. These are:

- > **Simulation training** – identify the types of distractions that are present during competition and systematically incorporate and learn to manage these distractions in training.
- > **Cue words** – identify some key words/phrases that remind you of what you need to concentrate on.
- > **Positive self-talk** – repeat positive self-statements/affirmations (for example, 'I am feeling fit and strong', 'I am ready to go', 'I can do this').
- > **Switching on and off** – identify appropriate points during training or competition at which to 'switch on' (that is, direct attention and energy to the task at hand) and 'switch off' (that is, allow thoughts/attention to shift to a non-performance focus).
- > **'Parking' thoughts** – try 'parking' your distracting thoughts. This involves putting them aside until a later time, typically by using a rational self-talk instruction or form of imagery that places the troublesome thought in a secure and non-distracting place until after the performance.
- > **Staying in the 'here and now'** – the only time frame that you have any control over is the present and therefore the importance of being present-focused cannot be overstated.

TAKE ACTION

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