

"What you can do to grow self-confidence"

Some days you just feel great about yourself and boy does it ever show in your performance! When you have confidence in yourself you feel like you can do just about anything, that the sky's the limit. During these wonderful moments you don't fear any opponent and perform loosely and aggressively. It's like the fear of losing is completely non-existent when you're confident. You defy the "experts" and even pull off an upset against that much tougher opponent. The funny thing is that when you feel good about yourself, in your mind this victory wasn't an upset! It's simply something you expected! If only you had access to that level of confidence all the time! If only....

Then there are those days when you feel completely overwhelmed, like a minnow swimming among sharks! You doubt yourself, question your abilities and seem too easily psyched out. Your play doesn't have its normal zip or energy. You're a half a step behind everyone else and your timing is off. You're easily intimidated and you just don't feel as strong or powerful. You're quick to be distracted by worries of mistakes and failing. In short, your self-confidence is nowhere to be found. When you feel this badly about yourself you begin to question why you're even still playing the sport.

There's no question that self-confidence plays a key role in how well you perform. When you have enough of it, you'll walk on water, performance-wise. You'll play to your physical potential. However, when your confidence level is running on empty, you'll perform like you're ten feet under that wet stuff. Everything is way off and your level of play is just a shadow of your capabilities!

If only having self-confidence was as simple as telling yourself, "BE CONFIDENT!" Unfortunately getting to feel good about yourself is much easier said than done. Most people have a battle going on inside themselves. One part of them says, "be confident!" only to hear from a second part that says, "Fat chance, loser! Both you and I know the real story here!"

So what can you do to start building a solid foundation of self-confidence as an athlete? Plenty!!!! Regularly practice the following "self-confidence rules" and your level of confidence will steadily rise:

1. PAY YOUR PHYSICAL DUES – There is no substitute for hard work. Self-confidence comes out of a solid base of physical training. If you’ve done your homework and trained well you have a right to feel confident. If you’ve regularly slacked off, trying to feel confident is a joke and it’s on you! Do everything possible in your power, and then do a little more! Confidence comes from knowing you’ve trained longer and harder than your competitors.

2. REMIND YOURSELF OF #1 – Before you perform it’s useful for you to remind yourself of everything that you’ve done to prepare. Sometimes under pressure you get too nervous to think clearly. You forget how well you trained. Get into the habit of regularly reminding yourself that you’ve paid your physical dues, that you’ve done everything possible to be ready. **3. DON’T COMPARE YOURSELF WITH OTHERS - FOCUS ON YOU** – One of the biggest confidence drains I know is to compare yourself with opponents, with their size, skill level, training habits, record, etc. Save yourself the aggravation! Comparison is a LOSING game! You’ll always find athletes who actually are or who you think are better than you. This is not a useful pre-performance ritual. Focus on YOU. Stay inside yourself. Play your OWN game. It really doesn’t matter if someone is bigger, stronger or faster than you. The bottom line is that in any given game/match/race the best athlete or team doesn’t usually come out on top! It’s the athlete or team that has more confidence and can keep their head on straight for that competition!

4. FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL – Another confidence drain is to focus on “uncontrollables” or things about the performance that are directly out of your control. Focusing on “UC’s” as I call them will make you uptight, kill your confidence and sabotage your play. “Uncontrollables” are your opponent, the officiating, the weather, field conditions, the past, the outcome, other people’s expectations, etc. Keep your focus locked onto what you can control (how you react to all the “uc’s” and should you find your concentration drifting from this, quickly return it!

5. DWELL ON THE POSITIVE – Get in the habit of looking for the upside of things. Being negative will not only kill your own confidence, but it will also sap the confidence of those around you. If the weather is foul, dwell on how this will bother your opponents more than you. If an opponent is bigger, faster or stronger, think about how they have much more to lose than you since you’re not expected to win. If a competitor starts to suddenly cheat or talk trash, think about why they are doing it, because they don’t feel that their skill level by itself is enough to beat you. Be positive! You’ll feel better about yourself and perform at a higher level.

6. CATCH YOURSELF DOING THINGS RIGHT – Start today to keep a “victory log” or a recording of the little things you did that day which were small victories. If you pushed yourself beyond a training limit, then record that. If you ran a little further, jumped a little higher, trained a little harder, record those. By getting in the habit of “hunting for your little daily victories” and writing them down, you will gradually build your self-confidence. Keep your victory log handy and review it daily, especially when you’re down.

7. BE A GOOD COACH TO YOURSELF – Get in the habit of being a forgiving, positive coach to yourself. When you make mistakes, learn from them and let them go. Don’t dwell on your mistakes and failures. Forgive yourself for them and then move on. Dwelling on mistakes and beating yourself up will only fill you with self-doubts.