

Pregame Performance Plan

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Special to the WUSA

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Do you follow your own favorite pregame superstitions? (Perhaps lucky socks or hoping to find that penny, heads up of course, on the way to the stadium). Do you have established pregame rituals? (Perhaps always putting on the right shoe before the left, or taking the stairs two at a time on the way to the game). Do you believe your game performance is mostly unpredictable and largely attributable to luck or to unknown forces? (e.g., "Thank goodness I played well today but who knows about tomorrow").

Unfortunately, many athletes view game day performance much like they do the weather report -- they wake up and hope it's going to be a great day. As I've suggested in a previous WUSA article entitled "Pregame Rituals Important," developing, implementing and refining your own, personal pregame preparation routine is as essential to athletic excellence as is physical conditioning, tactical sophistication and technical expertise. This is one aspect of performance over which you have almost total control.

Rather than relying on numerous outside forces over which you have limited or no control (e.g., the quality of your opponents, whether you start or not, the crowd, the media hype, the field, the weather conditions, or the officiating), athletes should be encouraged to take responsibility for preparing themselves appropriately to reach a peak level of performance each and every time they step out into the competitive arena.

By examining and contrasting the characteristics of your best performance with those preceding your worst performance, you can begin to discern the key elements of your ideal performance state. **Ask: How emotionally charged-up were you before the match? Did you feel mentally ready to compete? Where and on what was your focus? How worried were you about losing? How tense were you before competition? How confident were you?**

Once you have determined the essential precursors to your own best performance, then you are ready to develop a specific pregame performance plan that you consistently implement prior to training and competition. You will find a sample performance plan in this article that can serve as an initial guide. There is no "cookbook style" that suits everyone so the key is to make it meaningful and useful to you.

This **sample plan** includes two key components: the time frame involved in the competitive environment (e.g., waking up on game day, your drive to the field, on the field during warm-up, etc.) and the thoughts, feelings and behaviors that you have specifically targeted as essential to peak performance. **Examples of the thoughts, feelings and behaviors an athlete might include in the two minutes before the game are:**

1. Thoughts: "I'm ready, I'm fit, I'm ready to play" 2. Feelings: excited, confident, calm 3. Behaviors: slow, deep breath, stretch, high knee jumps

This log or checklist soon becomes part of the pregame routine. These routines give athletes specific, task-oriented guidelines to facilitate performance. They increase the likelihood that athletes will focus on productive thoughts, helpful emotions and facilitative behaviors rather than leaving performance up to chance, questionable superstitions or magic rituals.

Over time, these pregame plans become automated and so well honed that they are implemented with little conscious thought. By focusing on a personally developed routine based on proven strategies for success from the athlete's own competitive history, players can expect to feel a greater sense of confidence and readiness to perform well. This plan should be used for all competitions and should not differ significantly from game to game or from regular season to "big-time" competitions.

These plans are simple to construct and following competition, can also be used to evaluate performance. Whether you are a youth sport participant or an Olympic champion, developing a personal pregame performance plan should be an integral part of your athletic preparation.