

9. ACTIVATION

*"We're going to pump YOU up!"
-Hanz & Franz-*

How often do you need to "pump yourself up" during practice or games? When you need a boost of energy, are you able to activate yourself right away, or do you have a tendency to shift gears a few too many plays, periods, or events later? As it was emphasized many times throughout the workbook, every second counts in high level sport. For this reason, the moment you find yourself at an intensity level less than your optimal one, you need to do something about it. The following section presents some guidelines to help you regulate your intensity when you are *under-intense*.

Whatever the situation may be, when you detect that you are under-intense, you must ask yourself why and then make a choice to resolve it. You might choose to keep playing with less intensity and have a perfectly valuable reason for doing so, however, if you know deep down that you can play with more vigor, you are not doing yourself nor your team a favor by not doing so.

There are different strategies and techniques you can use to energize yourself. What has worked well for you in the past? Do you do one thing in particular that always seems to work? Or, do you need to vary your strategies in order for them to remain effective? Sometimes the novelty of a particular strategy might wear off and you'll find that after a while, it won't help you even if your life depends on it. The bottom line is that you should develop activation strategies based on your personal needs, and practice using them in training so that you don't have to think twice about applying them during competitions. You want the process to be automatic.

EXERCISE 9.1 - EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES TO ACTIVATE MYSELF

Think of situations in training and competition in which you were under-intense but able to psych yourself up to keep playing well. What did you do? Did you use a particular strategy or technique? What kind of focus or perspective did you have? How did you feel? Write down your thoughts below.

Situations Before/During/After Training	Effective Strategy / Technique
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▪	▪
▪	▪

EXERCISE 9.1 - EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES TO ACTIVATE MYSELF (cont)	
Situations Before / During / After Competition	Effective Strategy / Technique
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Use activation techniques when you need to gear yourself up to an ideal state for practice and games.

Scenario. Picture yourself behind the wheel of your favorite car getting primed up for the ride of your life. Being the smart person that you are, you know that you can drive the car at a certain speed that will make the ride a smooth and fuel-efficient one. At this speed,

you won't get lost because you won't miss any important signs along the way. Also, you won't get any speeding tickets that could cost you valuable time, money, and demerit points. In a similar way, there is an ideal speed to which you can gear yourself up to play your sport that will allow you to be smooth, focused and energy-efficient. You can't afford to miss important information from your coaches, teammates, opponents, or referees. Also, you can't afford to jeopardize your success or that of your team by making stupid mistakes. Remember that if you get too energized, you risk losing control and costing yourself or your team a victory.

If you are part of a team, you probably get ready for games as a team (i.e., stretching, warm-up, pre-game meeting). This means you have to be aware of situations where your coaches or teammates unintentionally psych you out. For example, if your coaches give the entire team a fired-up pep talk because they feel like you're not focused on the game or you're not taking your opponents seriously enough, you must listen to them but at the same time, keep your level of intensity under control. If you get distracted by one of your teammates who likes to be loud and obnoxious before games, you cannot let yourself get too wired from it. You must keep your level of activation at a desired level.

The following table outlines strategies that can be used for self-activation. Some might be more effective than others. Try them and choose to refine those that work best for you!

TABLE 9.1 - STRATEGIES FOR SELF-ACTIVATION	
Breathing:	Take a few quick and forceful breaths.
Stretching:	Stretch your muscles to get the energy and blood flowing.
Music:	Have your walk-man or ipod handy to listen to energizing music.
Videos:	Watch videos that stimulate or inspire you (i.e., Rocky, Rudy, intense previous performances).
Positive self-affirmations:	Repeat to yourself words or phrases that psych you up (i.e., "I am confident and in control," "I am intense," "I will dominate my opponents").
Imagery:	Imagine yourself playing with intensity and confidence. See and feel yourself scoring goals, high-fiving your teammates, winning a swim off, stealing the ball, etc. Hear the crowd cheering you on in the stands. See your teammates and coaches jumping up and down on the bench.
Goal-Setting:	Set challenging performance goals that will send you on a mission during a competition. Share them with your teammates and coaches (i.e., "I will keep our turnovers under three in each quarter").
Pep talk:	Encourage your teammates, show them your support, share your belief in them. Accept feedback from your coach and use it to energize yourself or your teammates (i.e., "C'mon gang! We can do it. Let's play with heart and show them who's the best. Let's have the time of our lives out there. We can enjoy the pain more than our opponents."). A pep talk can include personal challenges, stories, poems, silence, and/or rational statements, and can be communicated using different voice tones.
Workout:	Go for a run, a hard swim, do a few sprints, lift some weights, skip a rope.
Visual aids:	Post inspirational messages, catchy quotes, newspaper clippings, your goals or mission statement in your bedroom, your house, in the dressing room, or on bulletin boards. Every team member's goals and mission can also appear on the board. Posting challenging statements made by some of your opponents can also get you fired up for a game.
Energy from the environment:	Draw energy from the crowd, your opponents, your teammates and coaches, the sun, your country flag, your national anthem, etc. and channel it positively into your performance. You can tell yourself to do so (i.e., "The crowd is pumping me up and I'm feeling great!").

TABLE 9.1 - STRATEGIES FOR SELF-ACTIVATION <i>(cont)</i>	
Transfer of energy from emotions:	Channel the energy from emotions (i.e., happiness, surprise, interest), including those that can potentially have a negative impact on your performance (i.e., anger, fear, guilt, disgust, contempt, and sadness), into positive performance goals.
Self-hypnosis:	Engage in self-hypnosis and include post-hypnotic suggestions in your personal script that will help you get activated (i.e., "Tomorrow, I will be intense throughout the entire game," or "When I touch my thumb to my index finger, I will get extra energy").
Physical triggers:	Engage in physical actions that will lift you and combine them with positive affirmations (i.e., slap your thigh, squeeze your finger, kick your pedal, and say to yourself "Do it," "Wake up," "Now!," or "Charge!" etc.).

You can't just hope for the best, you have to take charge and go for the best.

The next exercise will help you identify situations in which you think it would be beneficial for you to use activation techniques during games.

EXERCISE 9.2 - CRITICAL COMPETITION SITUATIONS REQUIRING ACTIVATION	
Identify critical situations before, during and after competitions where you need to activate yourself, and devise a strategy for doing so. Be specific (i.e., I'm not motivated before a game when I know we are playing a really weak team; I tend to be flat after the 3 rd quarter; I lose it when we are behind 3 goals; I don't pay attention in the post-game meeting; I can't psych myself up before a game after we've lost the last 2 games).	
Before the Game	Strategy / Technique

EXERCISE 9.2 - CRITICAL COMPETITION SITUATIONS REQUIRING ACTIVATION <i>(cont)</i>	
During the Competition	Strategy / Technique
After the Competition	Strategy / Technique

When you are under-intense, it's important to determine why you are in such a state. Activation techniques can be helpful, however, you should avoid using them to try to overcome or "patch up" a problem that is physically-related. If you are lacking energy because you are overtraining or overcompeting, because you are injured, suffering from insomnia or you are not eating properly, you should consult your coach, a parent, physician, or mental training consultant to look more thoroughly into the matter.

TABLE 9.2 - SUMMARY SUGGESTIONS

1. Identify situations in which your performance is affected by a lack of intensity. Be prepared to deal with those situations immediately as they arise. Your time is precious and so is that of your coaches and teammates.
2. Develop effective activation strategies and techniques to psych yourself up when you are tired, bored, or unmotivated. Refer to what has worked best for you in the past.
3. Be aware of individuals or things that tend to psych you out. Sometimes you have to be selfish and keep to yourself in order to maintain your own optimal level of intensity.
4. Consult your coach, consultant, doctor or parents if your lack of intensity is caused by a physical problem.