

10. COMPETITION PLANS

A good plan today is better than a perfect plan tomorrow.

Planning is a very important step in the achievement of your optimal performance. You must learn and plan how to consistently create ideal physical, mental and emotional states to perform at your best in each game or competition.

Rarely will a peak performance occur if your preparation is left to chance or good and bad breaks.

This section can be considered as “the cherry on the cake” because it will help you integrate everything you have learned in the workbook into sound competition plans.

Do you remember one of the first exercises you did in this workbook? You were asked to reflect upon your best and worst performances, and to describe those experiences in great detail. This was the first step in getting you to start developing plans to guide your thoughts and actions, as well as how you feel during competitions.

Establishing pre-competition, competition and post-competition routines will not only help you form a **consistent** approach to performance, it will also help you feel ready, confident, and in control. You must organize your *internal* self and *external* environment in a way that will enable you to maximize how you want to feel, and to cope with unforeseen events; and not just at one competition, but at all competitions in which you will participate during your athletic career.

Flow States

Putting together a plan to help you *focus* and *refocus* in the face of distractions *before, during, and after* games will increase your chances of feeling the way you want to feel and achieving your goals.

Most elite athletes are in continuous search of achieving flow states. In some ways, flow states may be similar to the feeling you were asked to describe in exercise 1.1. If you have experienced flow before, you might agree that it is associated with:

- ☆ Positive emotions.
- ☆ Extremely focused attention.
- ☆ Total connection or oneness with the task at hand, to the point that you lose track of time and your surrounding environment.
- ☆ Feelings that every part of your body moves automatically and effortlessly.

EXERCISE 13.1 ← MY DESCRIPTION OF A FLOW EXPERIENCE

Have you ever experienced flow or anything similar to what has just been described above? If so, describe it here. Provide as many details as possible in order to be able to recapture it in future performances. Refer to Exercise 1.1.

My flow state...

Refining your attentional skills to the extent that you are able to automatically process the right information at the right time will significantly increase your chances of experiencing this remarkable performance state.

There are several steps to creating and maintaining flow states or a peak performance. You must first:

- Be aware and in control of yourself
- Develop a reliable plan
- Implement your plan with confidence, trust and effortlessness

Remember these three steps. They are critical.

You have done many exercises throughout the workbook to increase your awareness and control of your personal self and performances. You probably already have a plan or a routine to get ready for games, and just need to refine it. If not, you can start developing one now. The trusting part comes with knowing that you have done everything possible to prepare for your game. Your ability to trust

yourself, completely believe in your plan, and carry it out without too much effort will increase as you fine-tune it and test it in many game situations.

a) Be Aware and in Control of Yourself

Being aware and in control means that you must play **one pass** or **one shot** at a time, and playing one pass or one shot at a time requires that you do regular checks to see if you are in control. Are you loose? Are you thinking confident thoughts? Do you have the proper focus? Checking in regularly like this will increase your awareness of important details that will make a difference in your performance. Remember that you must practice doing this in training if you want to be able to do it automatically in games.

Here's a tip: Imagine that you have a **traffic light** inside of you telling you when to **Go**, **Slow down**, or **Stop**. If you drive a car, you know that you don't really think as you approach a traffic light; you see the light and respond to it. It's the same thing in sport. You shouldn't think too much when you're playing, you should just be aware of what's happening to you and around you, and respond to it. Be in touch with how you feel as well as with your thoughts and actions to know if you have a green, yellow or red light:

- 1. Green light**
 - You are playing well.
 - You have flow, rhythm, or momentum and you feel the way you want
- 2. Yellow light**
 - You are having a bit of trouble.
 - You might have made a bad pass or missed a shot at the goalie.
 - You are a little too tense, not quite focused, or you are rushing.
- 3. Red light**
 - You are really struggling.
 - You might have missed 2-3 passes and the coach is not impressed, you had a breakaway and couldn't finish, the coach benched you
 - Your mind is racing, you are stressed out and tense, and you just want to get the game over with.

Learn to recognize when you experience a green light and when you don't. Regaining control isn't that difficult at the yellow stage, but when you hit a red light, it becomes tougher. Unfortunately, when athletes sense a yellow light, they react the same way as most drivers would - they speed up to get through it.

Would you say this is your common response to a stressful situation in your sport? You perceive the game going faster and faster, so you go faster and faster to keep up? Watch out, this can lead to trouble! You can get away with disobeying or not seeing your internal traffic light sometimes, but before long you'll end up crashing.

To avoid setbacks, see the traffic light as you approach it. If it changes to yellow, keep your composure and make a sound decision about how to react. The following exercise will help you further increase your awareness of your own personal traffic light so that you can play with confidence, consistency and control, and avoid spiraling out of control from a **Green** to **Yellow** to **Red** light.

EXERCISE 13.2 ← RESPECTING MY PERSONAL TRAFFIC LIGHT TO PLAY WITH CONFIDENCE, CONSISTENCY AND CONTROL

Think of situations that cause you to hit a yellow or red light. Know in advance what these “intersections” are and make a point of checking your internal traffic light to keep your performance under control. Remember that you can’t make any adjustments required to play consistently if you are not aware that adjustments are needed.

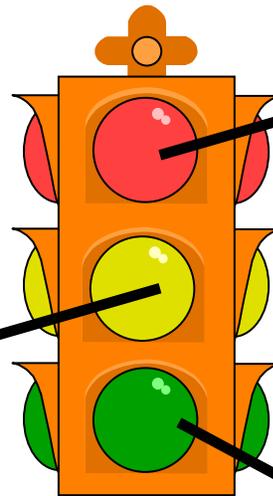
YELLOW LIGHTS

I get a yellow light when:

When I have a yellow light, I feel:

When I have a yellow light, I will do:

ME ON OFFENSE



RED LIGHTS

I get a red light when:

When I have a red light, I feel:

When I have a red light, I will do:

GREEN LIGHTS

I get a green light when:

When I have a green light, I feel:

When I have a green light, I do:

EXERCISE 13.2 ← RESPECTING MY PERSONAL TRAFFIC LIGHT TO PLAY WITH CONFIDENCE, CONSISTENCY AND CONTROL (cont)

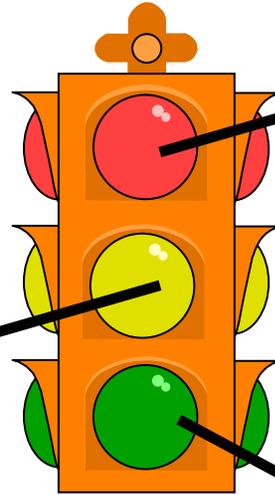
YELLOW LIGHTS

I get a yellow light when:

When I have a yellow light, I feel:

When I have a yellow light, I will do:

ME ON DEFENSE



RED LIGHTS

I get a red light when:

When I have a red light, I feel:

When I have a red light, I can will do:

GREEN LIGHTS

I get a green light when:

When I have a green light, I feel:

When I have a green light, I do:

b) Develop a Reliable Plan

Do you have a pre-set routine or ritual that you like to follow when you get ready for games? If so, is it effective? Could you improve it? The next step in creating and maintaining flow states or a peak performance is to develop a trustworthy plan for your:

1. Pre-game performance → getting focused and optimally intense, be engaged the process.
2. Performance during the game → staying focused and optimally intense, refocusing in the face of distractions, be engaged in the process.
3. Post-game performance → staying focused for the game debrief, drawing lessons, reviewing and implementing goals, be engaged in the process regardless of the outcome.

Table 13.1 contains guidelines to help you devise your competition plan.

TABLE 13.1 ← GUIDELINES TO DEVELOP AN APPROPRIATE GAME PLAN

1. Consider what you need to do physically, mentally, technically, and tactically to have an excellent performance (*see Section 1*). Highlight not only relevant actions (i.e., relaxing, eating, stretching, warming up, focusing during pre-game meeting, psyching yourself up), but also relevant cue words or triggers that will help you stay connected or get re-connected when you lose your focus or do not feel the way you want.
2. Incorporate both individual and team activities since you are part of a team sport.
3. Plan what you have to do from the time you wake-up the morning of the game right up until it is over and you have drawn lessons for your next practice and game.
4. Be flexible enough so that you feel comfortable changing or adapting your plan as the game or competition unfolds. The last thing you want is to feel confined or pressured into following it “to a tee” no matter what happens. Remember that although the goal of your plan is to help you *consistently* and *systematically* prepare yourself to perform well, there are distractions or unforeseen circumstances that will require you to modify your preparation. This is why you should always have a plan A, B, and C in case things don’t go as planned.
5. Ask your coach and/or a sport psychology consultant to help you develop your game plan.
6. Experiment with your plan. Test it in different situations to determine which part is or isn’t helpful. Trial-and-error is an inevitable part of your learning process.
7. Evaluate your performance after **each** game or competition. Analyze both your successes and failures. Pay attention to details as they are extremely important when you are competing at a high level. Draw significant lessons and use them to improve your plan for future competitions.

TABLE 13.1 ← GUIDELINES TO DEVELOP AN APPROPRIATE GAME PLAN (cont)

8. **Record** your plan as you go. This step cannot be emphasized enough. It is really too risky to rely on memory alone. If you want to perform consistently over time, you will have to continuously increase your awareness of what works best for you. This means that as years go by, you will accumulate tons of information and draw thousands of valuable lessons. Get into the habit of writing them down in a journal or a logbook. You don't have to do it every day, but do it at least a couple of times per week or after each game. This way you'll be able to track what is and isn't effective, and you'll be able to adapt your goals and performance accordingly. You'll also be able to refer to your journal when you hit performance lows. In those difficult situations, reviewing your "highs" could be instrumental in helping you get out of the whole or a vicious cycle.

The following exercises will help you prepare yourself to play your sport with awareness, confidence, consistency, and control. Remember, don't leave anything to chance. You don't want to get to the Olympics or the most important final game of your life and fail because it wasn't your lucky day. When you are called upon to perform, be ready. Planning for competitions will allow you to do that. You will be able to trust your abilities, put yourself on auto-pilot, and do it.

**You shouldn't feel imprisoned
by your plans, you should
feel liberated by them.**

EXERCISE 13.3 ← DEVELOPING MY PRE-GAME PLAN (cont)

ONCE I AM ON SITE (i.e., stretching, warm-up, pre-game meeting, etc.)

What to do	Desired thoughts / How I want to feel	Images / Triggers / Cue Words	Refocusing / Coping Responses
<input type="checkbox"/>	➔	➔	➔
<input type="checkbox"/>	➔	➔	➔
<input type="checkbox"/>	➔	➔	➔
<input type="checkbox"/>	➔	➔	➔
<input type="checkbox"/>	➔	➔	➔
<input type="checkbox"/>	➔	➔	➔
<input type="checkbox"/>	➔	➔	➔
<input type="checkbox"/>	➔	➔	➔

EXERCISE 13.5 ← MY REFOCUSING PLAN	
Outline thoughts, images, physical triggers and/or cue words you will use to refocus during competition in the face of the following distractions.	
The bus breaks down on the way to the game.	<i>Positive thought, image, physical trigger, and/or cue word:</i>
You have misplaced something and can't play until you find it.	<i>Positive thought, image, physical trigger, and/or cue word:</i>
Environmental conditions are poor (i.e., poor lighting).	<i>Positive thought, image, physical trigger, and/or cue word:</i>
You are extremely nervous.	<i>Positive thought, image, physical trigger, and/or cue word:</i>
The game is delayed.	<i>Positive thought, image, physical trigger, and/or cue word:</i>
You had a heavy meal before your game and you don't feel good.	<i>Positive thought, image, physical trigger, and/or cue word:</i>
You have a really poor start.	<i>Positive thought, image, physical trigger, and/or cue word:</i>
The other team scores the first goal.	<i>Positive thought, image, physical trigger, and/or cue word:</i>
You get injured.	<i>Positive thought, image, physical trigger, and/or cue word:</i>
One of your opponents verbally psychs you out.	<i>Positive thought, image, physical trigger, and/or cue word:</i>
The communication among your team breaks down.	<i>Positive thought, image, physical trigger, and/or cue word:</i>
You have had two penalties against you.	<i>Positive thought, image, physical trigger, and/or cue word:</i>
Your coach gets thrown out of the game.	<i>Positive thought, image, physical trigger, and/or cue word:</i>
You have no energy left.	<i>Positive thought, image, physical trigger, and/or cue word:</i>

Since you are part of a team sport, it's important to not only plan for your performance, but also for the performance of others. It's obvious you can't control your opponents' play, however, you can incorporate strategies in your plan to deal with certain players or goalies you or your coach have scouted. Often times, your coach will tell you to match up with certain players. If you know this in advance and you have identified their strengths and weaknesses in past games, you will be able to devise a game plan to counteract their strengths and capitalize on their weaknesses. Start documenting your opponents' performances in your journal so you are able to do exercises like the following before each game.

EXERCISE 13.6 ← PLANNING FOR MY OPPONENTS

Date: _____ Opponent Team: _____

Player(s) I have to watch out for: _____

Their strengths:

Their weaknesses:

My strengths against them:

My strategies to dominate them:

Key words or actions:

EXERCISE 13.7 ← PLANNING TO SCORE AGAINST THE GOALIE

Date: _____ Opponent Team: _____

Goalie(s) I have to watch out for: _____

Their strengths (preferred playing style):

Their weaknesses:

My strengths against them:

My strategies to score goals against them:

Key words or actions:

As previously mentioned, evaluating your performance after each game is extremely important and valuable. Table 13.2 outlines steps you can go through after a competition to debrief it effectively. Integrate these steps in your post-game plan (*see Exercise 13.8*).

Step 1	FEEL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you feel? • <u>What exactly</u> do you feel? • Get your feelings under control before you attempt to evaluate your performance or share information with others. • Channel the energy from your emotions into drawing valuable lessons for the next game.
Step 2	THINK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did you do well? What could you have done better? • Be accurate and objective in assessing the outcome of your performance (<i>see next exercise</i>). • Take responsibility for your own actions. • Be honest with yourself and with others. • Assess the whole picture.
Step 3	COMMUNICATE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you want to communicate to your teammates and coaches? • If you didn't do your job, do you accept the situation as it is and avoid trying to justify it? Or, do you want to say something to try to get yourself off the hook? • Whatever you do, say something constructive that will strengthen the team's performance.
Step 4	INTERNALIZE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digest the game. Don't chew on it for too long. • If it was bad, draw out constructive lessons, then park it. • If it was good, draw out lessons as well and carry the positive feelings with you as you move on to your next activity.
Step 5	DO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the lessons you have learned. • Refine your game plan, make changes if needed. • Set new goals if needed.

Taking responsibility for your actions means choosing what to think, how to act, and how to feel rather than blindly reacting to situations.

Attributions

Have you ever been asked by your coaches, teammates, family, friends, or the media why you performed a certain way in a game? You must have. Are you always able to provide an honest and rational answer? What reasons do you tend to give when you play well? How about when you play poorly? Are you usually right? Making **accurate attributions** is an important part of your post-game reflection. Your attributions are derived from your perceptions of the game, your ability to read and analyze it, and the feedback you get from your environment (i.e., coaches, teammates, fans, media, etc.). You must be able to make appropriate attributions because they will influence the lessons you will draw and the changes you will make to your game plan for future performances. The following table provides guidelines to make correct attributions.

TABLE 13.3 ← GUIDELINES TO MAKE APPROPRIATE ATTRIBUTIONS	
<p><i>WIN - PLAY WELL</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attribute your success to your abilities and to those of your teammates (physical, mental, technical, tactical). • Be satisfied, not as much from winning but from giving a solid effort and a good performance. • If it's a major win, don't get too confident so that you think your team is so superior that you don't need to continue investing so much effort. • Reward yourself, feel good if you have achieved your performance goals. • Focus your attention on skills or plays that need improvement. 	<p><i>LOSE - PLAY WELL</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attribute the loss to the superior play of your opponents that day. • Focus on the need to improve mental, physical, technical, and/or tactical skills to win in the future. • Refrain from attributing the opponents' win to luck or referees' bad calls, unless these clearly are the causes. • Be satisfied, feel good about your performance and the solid effort you put forth, despite the loss. • Reward yourself if you have achieved your personal performance goals.
<p><i>WIN - PLAY POORLY</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attribute your success to a weaker opponent or perhaps even to luck, rather than to team ability. • If your effort was inadequate, examine why. • Identify the skills you didn't perform well and devise a plan to refine them. • Remain positive and constructive. • Reward yourself and feel good if you have played well and put in a solid effort. 	<p><i>LOSE - PLAY POORLY</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attribute your loss to your team's inferior effort, as well as to the need to improve mental, physical, technical and/or tactical skills. • You should be dissatisfied with your team's poor effort and performance and with yours if you have not played well, but not with the loss. • Learn from the game, don't dwell on the loss, draw out something positive. • If you didn't achieve your goals, look for the reasons and return to practice with the conviction that your performance will improve. • Look forward to taking the next step toward achieving your goals. • Reward yourself if you displayed a solid effort and you achieved your performance goals.

c) Implement your Game Plan with Trust

The last step in creating and maintaining flow states or a peak performance is practicing and implementing your pre-, during-, and post-game plans automatically and effortlessly. You must believe in your plans and trust that they will allow you to play your sport with confidence, extreme focus, intensity, control, and most importantly, consistency. Test, analyze, and refine them on a regular basis.

You have come a long way. Feel good about this. You now know and understand that to excel in your sport, you must prepare yourself not only physically, technically, and tactically, but also **mentally** and **emotionally**. It's time to seriously start training these last two components.

You have spent a lot of time reflecting on and completing the exercises in this workbook. Use the knowledge and tools you have acquired to refine your mental skills on a daily basis during practices, games and also when you engage in activities outside of your sport.

Save some time and work on your mental and physical skills together rather than in isolation. It doesn't take that much more time to take a deep breath, repeat a cue word, imagine a play, or drain a negative thought when you are practicing technical skills and tactical drills. It also doesn't take that much more time to write down your goals and evaluate them. It's just a matter of doing it.

Don't procrastinate, **start today**. Incorporate mental training activities in your agenda. Make a point of feeling good and getting engaged every day. If you prefer to work on one technique at a time, then do this. Take a few weeks to complete one section of the workbook and really internalize the exercises and information presented. Be innovative and create some of your own exercises. When you feel confident about a skill, move to another one.

Once you have a good grasp of all the mental skills and perspectives presented in the workbook, try to work on them a little bit every day. Take advantage of the power of your mind to get "mentally fit." Here's a final thought:

**There are those athletes who thought
but never did, those who did and never
thought, and those who thought and
then went out and did it.**

TABLE 13.4 ← SUMMARY SUGGESTIONS

1. Organize your thoughts and actions into a cohesive and reliable plan that will facilitate the process of competing at a high level.
2. Develop a plan that will enable you to feel the way you want (ex. ready, confident, focused, in control) before, during and after competitions.
3. Include as many details as possible in your competition plans. Don't leave anything to chance.
4. Record your plans in a journal or logbook. Make a habit of analyzing your games, whether you win or lose, and write down your lessons as well as any changes you need to make to your plans.
5. Increase your confidence and trust by developing an effective focusing and refocusing plan for an entire competition. This way, you will feel prepared and anticipate with eagerness any possible situation or distraction.
6. Incorporate into your plans strategies to remain engaged on a daily basis throughout a competition.
7. Be flexible with your plans. Devise a plan A, B, and C to ensure that you have an appropriate response to all potential situations. Always be prepared to make changes as a competition unfolds.