Mental Plan Development as Part of the Coaching Process

‘Starter Kit’ for (Mental) Performance Management

Guido Geisler, PhD
University of Tsukuba

14 July 2016
Coaching Team / Support Team

- Head coach
- Assistant coach(es)
- Specialty coach(es)
- Video analyst(s)
- Scout(s)
- Manager
- Athletic trainer
- Physiotherapist
- Cook
- Sport psychologist / mental trainer

“Everything you do matters; it either enhances your chance to win or undermines your efforts to do so. There’s no grey area, nothing in between.” (DiCicco, 2014)
Opening teasers ...

- Research on soccer **penalty kicks** → how is performance (scoring) affected by:
  - Approach vs. avoidance behaviour (backing up vs. turning/walking back)?
  - Post-whistle response speed?
  - GK-dependent vs. GK-independent decision-making?
  - Type (or lack) of celebration after scoring (in a shootout)?
  - Goalkeepers waving their arms/jumping back & forth before the kick?

(Jordet & colleagues)
Consider this …

- Elite soccer players have 40-50 interactions with the ball per game → they average no more than 2 touches per interaction & spend less than 2 minutes in possession overall.
- ~98% of time is spent on perception (mental appraisal of input) & decision making (mental processing) … ~2% is spent on action (physical output) (UEFA-A coaching license course, 2013).
- It therefore shouldn’t be surprising that most players fatigue mentally before they fatigue physically.

Necessary to train the psychological dimension, which entails developing core mental strength → the mental equivalent of core physical strength.
There are two simple answers to every question in psychology

1. It depends …
2. Some people do, some people don’t …

Coach’s job to know:

1) … what it depends on (for different players)
2) … which players do, which players don’t (& when, why)

Take-home point: Physical strength/conditioning, technique, & tactics are trained regularly; developing **core mental strength/mental control** warrants similar attention – consistent performance requires all four dimensions to come together
Research Support

- Research suggests that on any given day, 40% - 90% of performance can be attributed to players’ mental readiness at that time → after taking other factors into account.

- Up to 85% of studies show that mental skill development is an effective means of enhancing sport performance & consistency (Burton & Raedeke, 2008).

*** But understand that mental strength/mental control is not independent → it can provide a foundation through which all four performance dimensions are managed.***
Mental Readiness?
Mental Readiness?
Mental Control?
When it all comes together
Overview (& Effects) of Optimal Mental Skills
Flow State ("In the Zone")

– Mental Strength/Control for Optimal Performance –
(Physical, Technical, Tactical)
### Where we want to end up today …

#### REFLECTION & MENTAL PLAN WORKSHEET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT?</th>
<th>AREA(S) TO IMPROVE</th>
<th>AREA(S) TO MAINTAIN</th>
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<tr>
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<td>I sometimes pass the ball automatically to the teammate who’s in my direct line of sight (without checking over my shoulder for other pass options)</td>
<td>I’m always alert to possession changes and have the positional discipline to jump into our own counter-attacks/quickly assume my own role in defending counters</td>
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| WHEN? |                                                                            |                                                                 |                                                                 |                                                                 |
|-------|                                                                            |                                                                 |                                                                 |                                                                 |
|       | When I receive the ball in tight spaces, or when I get lazy/mentally switch off for a moment | After either team wins the ball back and has the potential to gain a numerical advantage |                                                                 |                                                                 |

| HOW? |                                                                            |                                                                 |                                                                 |                                                                 |
|------|                                                                            |                                                                 |                                                                 |                                                                 |
|      | ‘Head on a swivel’ – check over my shoulders continuously throughout the game, and especially before I call for the ball and/or receive a pass | Good anticipation – I read the play early, and take my position early and quickly |                                                                 |                                                                 |

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<td></td>
<td>1) Check over my shoulders every 5-10 seconds</td>
<td>1) Be one of the first 2 players on my team to get into the opposing half on our own counter-attacks</td>
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<td>2) Make sure it takes a maximum of 1 second to do so</td>
<td>2) Never be behind the ball on opposing counter-attacks once inside my own half</td>
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<td>3) Check over my shoulders every time I call for a pass and every time I receive the ball</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>CUE WORDS/SELF-TALK for the situation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Swivel”</td>
<td>“Counter”</td>
<td>“Numerical advantage”</td>
<td>“Go”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“5 seconds”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Famous player’s name)</td>
<td></td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>MENTAL REHEARSAL/IMAGERY for the situation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visualize myself quickly surveying the space around me before every call and pass reception – incorporate various scenarios for other players’ locations and my subsequent first movement</td>
<td>Visualize myself joining the counter-attack and (1) being the high passing option; (2) scoring from the counter-attack sequence; and (3) breaking up the opponent’s counter-attack</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Mentally rehearse this before the game and during stoppages; incorporate the selected cue words into my rehearsals</td>
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The Process of Developing Mental Control

- Awareness
- Preparation
- Action
- Habit

... through the development of mental plans/strategies ("virtual experience")

Guiding questions:
WHAT, WHEN, & HOW

Ultimate goal is HABIT FORMATION

Excellence is not a series of independent acts; it’s the result of repetition of a set of habits
Real-Life Illustrations
– World Cup 2014 –
Mental – Technical Link
Mental – Technical Link
Inspired, ready, sense of challenge & fun

Excited, physical energy alongside mental calm

Alert, narrow-broad attention as necessary

Assured, high self-efficacy, problem solver

Smooth & mindless movements, quick decision-making

Motivation/Determination

Energy/Arousal & Stress/Emotions

Concentration/Attention

Confidence

Automaticity

Mental Skills

*Costly error*  *Conceded goal*  *Missed scoring chance*  *Repeated fouls*

*Verbal altercation*  *Hostile crowd*  *Poor officiating*
Inspired, ready, sense of challenge & fun

Excited, physical energy alongside mental calm

Alert, narrow-broad attention as necessary

Assured, high self-efficacy, problem solver

Smooth & mindless movements, quick decision-making

*Missed scoring chance

Mental Skills

*Missed scoring chance

Motivation/Determination

Energy/Arousal & Stress/Emotions

Concentration/Attention

Confidence

Automaticity

Sense of threat, little/no sense of fun, uninspired

Mentally jumpy, over-aroused

Distracted, incorrect attentional focus

Self-doubt, pessimistic, avoidance of failure

Indecisive, hesitant, ‘paralysis by analysis’
(Inadequate) Mental Control – Effect on Arousal & Attentional Focus
Inspired, ready, sense of challenge & fun

Excited, physical energy alongside mental calm

Alert, narrow-broad attention as necessary

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Smooth & mindless movements, quick decision-making

Motivation/Determination

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Sense of threat, little/no sense of fun, uninspired

Nervous, mentally jumpy, physically lethargic

Distracted, incorrect attentional focus

Self-doubt, pessimistic, avoidance of failure

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**Mental Tools**

*Goal Setting  *Self-Talk  *Visualization/MR

... through the creation of **Mental Plans** ... & corresponding Formation of Habits
Mental Control – Underlying Consideration

The core of Mental Control is … **CONTROL**

- Athletes must learn to identify & control the “controllables” while creating strategies to ‘park’ the rest

- For all pre- and in-game thoughts, they should ask themselves: “Can I control this?”

- Outcome is **not controllable** … what *can* be controlled is **process** (*performance & preparation*) … such that players give themselves the best chance for a successful outcome

  Success cannot be planned, but performance can
## EURO 2016 Qualifying

(www.uefa.com)

### Controlling outcome?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goals scored</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Possession %</strong></td>
<td>38</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total attempts</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attempts on target</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attempts off target</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attempts blocked</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attempts against woodwork</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corners</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Offsides</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yellow cards</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fouls committed</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attempted Passes</strong></td>
<td>207</td>
<td>525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Completed passes</strong></td>
<td>177</td>
<td>486</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
<th>Spain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Goals scored</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Possession %</strong></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total attempts</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attempts on target</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Attempts blocked</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td><strong>Corners</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Offsides</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yellow cards</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fouls committed</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Attempted Passes</strong></td>
<td>159</td>
<td>570</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Completed passes</strong></td>
<td>136</td>
<td>526</td>
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The Process of Developing Mental Control

**Awareness → Preparation → Action → Habit**

- **Awareness**
  - People act according to how they *feel*, not according to what they *know* … athletes thus need to understand & acknowledge what’s happening at a deeper level, in their *subconscious* … *where certain thoughts might be uncomfortable*

  - Traditional psychological skills training was based on changing negative thoughts; modern notion of ‘mindfulness’ is to accept thoughts as naturally occurring (“experience acceptance”, willingness to encounter adversity) … then *manage* them
The Process

- **Awareness**

**Reflection**

- A common source of player anxiety is **uncertainty**

- Therefore important to identify what typically affects **each** player personally → situations commonly faced in games & training, plus common response(s)

- Reflection also triggers players to define their **IDENTITY** – based on **ROLE** within the team, (realistic) self-image, & what they want to become

- Reflection should address both competition & training sessions (**strengths** → what to **maintain**; & **weaknesses** → where to **improve**)

  - Logbooks, **worksheets**
  - Performance profiling (Butler & Hardy, 1992)
  - Inventories/questionnaires (e.g., IZOF; SOMIFA; **others**)


---

**The Process**

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• Butler & Hardy (1992)
Real-Life Example

Masumi Narusawa
Awareness of ALL passing options (vision)

Staying on task (focused) after mistakes

Agility (with & without ball)

Quick transitions between offense & defense

Upper & lower body strength

Stick-work speed in front of goal (attack)
Developing Mental Control – *Personal Mental Plans*

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<th>REFLECTION &amp; MENTAL PLAN WORKSHEET</th>
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<td><strong>WHAT?</strong></td>
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- **SET GOAL(S) for the situation**
- **CUE WORDS/SELF-TALK for the situation**
- **MENTAL REHEARSAL/IMAGERY for the situation**
The Process

- **Preparation**

**Goal setting**

- Defining specific, measurable, & realistic-but-challenging targets to address identified strengths (areas to maintain) and weaknesses (areas to improve)
- Individual, paired, and/or team goal setting
- Top performers develop a **goal mentality**; they set personal goals & targets (for training & for games) on a daily basis
- Follow a continuous cycle of setting goal(s), training, game, review, setting goal(s), training, game, review …

- Process Goals – Performance Goals – Outcome Goals
# Developing Mental Control – *Personal Mental Plans*

## Reflection & Mental Plan Worksheet

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<td>- When I receive the ball in tight spaces, or when I get lazy/mentally switch off for a moment</td>
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### SET GOAL(S) for the situation

### CUE WORDS/SELF-TALK for the situation

### MENTAL REHEARSAL/IMAGERY for the situation
The Process

- **Action**

  - **Self-Talk / Cue Words**
    - Can set individual, paired, and/or team cue words
    - Simple words or actual statements/sentences
    - Encourages players to think positively & ‘park’ negative thoughts, thereby increasing confidence & self-efficacy
      - **Technique**-Specific Self-Talk – to enhance execution
        - “Snap the wrist”
      - Self-Talk for **Encouragement/Effort** – to foster perseverance
        - “You’re equal to it”, “You’ve done this many times”
      - **Mood** Words – to increase arousal or to calm down
        - “Go”, “Faster”, “Breathe”

  - **Visualization / Mental Rehearsal**
    - Internal or external perspective; images always positive/successful
    - Generally at real-life tempo & in full (not broken down into parts); easier/more effective with practice
# Developing Mental Control – Personal Mental Plans

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### SET GOAL(S) for the situation

1. Check over my shoulders every 5-10 seconds
2. Make sure it takes a maximum of 1 second to do so
3. Check over my shoulders *every time* I call for a pass and every time I receive the ball

### CUE WORDS/SELF-TALK for the situation

1. Be one of the first 2 players on my team to get into the opposing half on our own counter-attacks
2. Never be behind the ball on opposing counter-attacks once inside my own half

### MENTAL REHEARSAL/IMAGERY for the situation

None
The Process

- **Habit**

  - Ultimate objective is to facilitate repetition & create positive/appropriate patterns (correct “dominant tendencies”), which result in the **Formation of Habits**

  - Habit formation is aided by the feeling that one has been there before, & been there often (“virtual experience”) … through the exercise of creating mental plans

  **Excellence is not a series of independent acts; it results from the repetition of a set of habits**
WC 2014  Mental – Technical Link

Habit?
WC 2014 Mental – Technical Link

Mental Readiness - Habit
Utility of Mental Plans to Correct Errors
(‘Improve’)
Utility of Mental Plans to Replicate Play

(‘Maintain’)
The person who has just lost and the one who is at the peak of their success are in exactly the same position. Each must decide what they will do next; each must choose the course that will lead to the next success.

- Kano Jigoro
Mental Calm, Mental Control
– Finding Solutions & Optimizing Performance –

shown at
www.dksrealm.net
Thank you for your attention

Suggested Resource