

PSYCHOLOGY OF RACING GRANT GILES (AEROMAX)

In these days of ever more competitive racing fields, both in the professional and age group ranks, the focus is more now than ever on improving training techniques. People are obsessed with the physiology of race performance and it seems the psychology of a successful race performance is going for the most part ignored.

So this month I thought I would focus on the mental aspects of successful training /racing performances.

Multi-sport endurance racing in this day and age has become far more of a mental game. Shoulder to shoulder racing is far more common now than ever before and a handy edge is often held by the person with the better focus and the mental 'smarts' to be able to hang tough 'til the end.

The best example of this was Mark Allen. When he raced he was a mental machine - you could see the focus in his eyes - It was almost like he was in a time warp of his own. He never looked ragged, his form was always perfect and I'll bet his focus was total performance orientated and this takes practise. To block out counter productive thoughts is a very difficult thing to do, but with practise and some good guidelines it can be achieved very successfully.

NEGATIVE THINKING

Your race that you have trained so hard for can come unravelled in no time at all if all that positive training response gets overridden by a negative mind and worry that is based in no fact.

There are four aspects that need to be considered with negative thinking and they are:

A) Attributing factor

- **Race / Event:**
Concerns over racing (IE:)
Not qualifying
Wind / Heat
Losing time
Bad Swims / Splits etc.
General Race Related Worry

B) Your belief system

- **Your Perception of Problems**
Negative Self Talk (IE:)
I'm not feeling good
Oh No! I got passed
I'm blowing up

C) Emotional consequence

- **Negative Responses**
Anxious (IE:)
Worried
Lose Confidence

Physical Weakness
Race Badly as a Consequence

- *This is the end of the line caused by the attributing factor, this is where you must challenge your perception of the problems at hand by moving on to the disputation stage or better still don't let it get to the later stages in the first instance.*

D) Disputation - This being the factor that can override negative thinking.

- **Challenge Negative Talk**
What evidence is there I won't race well?
OK! I got passed but I'll focus on maximising my performance
It's hurting but it will pass, I'll be patient
I'm tired but I'll focus on form

Look for positive answers to all questions both before and during races. Also look for positives in your post race summary

Summation:

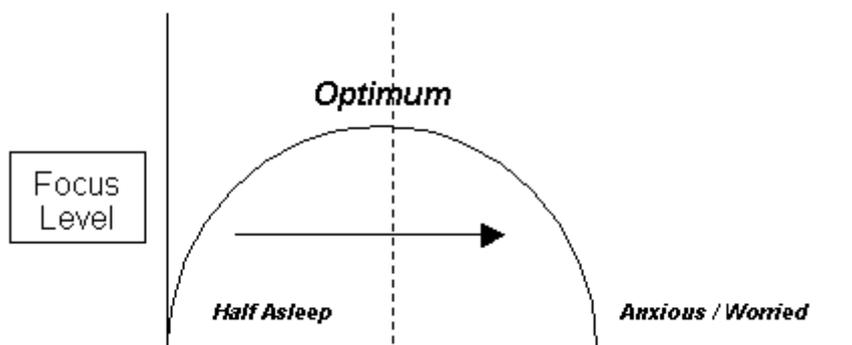
Negative talk = Challenge = Positive responses...

PRE RACE AROUSAL

Optimum pre race arousal. This is the state that will give the athlete the best level of focus for the race at hand, a balance between too little and too much.

1. Under Aroused: A feeling of can't be bothered, what am I doing here, yawning and bored.
2. Over Aroused: Hyped up, nervous, anxious - thinking about outcomes.

The states are both counterproductive and will impact on race performance badly.



Arousal Level

There are certain ways to achieve this level of optimum arousal through being focused but most importantly calm.

Calm is a state that is necessary to minimise energy wasted before the start of the race, an anxious state promotes tense muscles and this is a waste of precious energy both physical and mental.

CALM / OPTIMUM FOCUS

The best way to program the mind is to first reach a relaxed state, practise this in 20 minutes sessions at home.

First find a quiet room, start by relaxing your face and work down every muscle in your body until the body is totally relaxed and there is no tension in any muscle whatsoever.

When you have reached the relaxed calm state, go though your race from start to finish in your mind. Stay relaxed and calm; picture yourself swimming / cycling / running strongly with great form. Whenever you feel the butterflies creeping into the equation think '*calm*' as you breath out for five breaths, this brings you back to the relaxed state.

Make this part of your training program and you'll be amazed at the results, even if you can commit to it over the last three weeks or so before a big race it can have very positive effects on race day.

PROGRAMME

3 x per week of 20 minute sessions.

1 x extra the night before the race / event.

RACE MORNING / STRATEGIES

1) Get to the transition area early, pump tires etc then find a nice quite area (ie) backstreet, warm up but stay relaxed, keep thinking calm as you breath out release all tension from muscles at the same time.

2) As the time draws nearer to the start and the butterflies are welling up this is the time that you need to take control, keep your emotions in check, chant the mantra as you enter the water, calm relax.

I remember an article written by Mark Allen on this and the fact that you should keep all emotion to the back and not let it out until you are well and truly over the line. Other athlete's have referred to him as a psychic vampire for his amazing ability to block out everything else except for his own performance.

DURING RACE

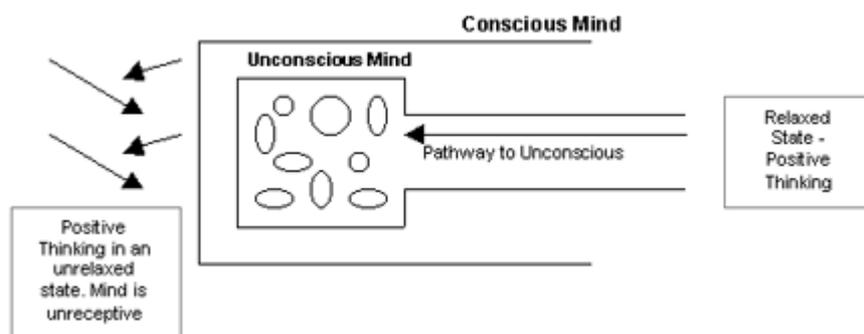
Now the race has began you need to utilise the mind work you have been doing over the last weeks and keep an internal focus that is to maximise performance and keep distractive thought processes at bay.

The best way to do this is to use key words to keep the focus, words such as calm -focus as you breath out can do the trick nicely. You can also have other key words for race problems such as being passed or feeling a bad patch, using words such maximise my own potential can give you a renewed focus if things are not going the way you planned.

Becoming uptight about situations in racing doesn't help, leave it until after the race to let the steam off but above all stay focused while your on the course.

Why a relaxed state

A relaxed state is needed to reach your subconscious mind, otherwise all the positive affirmations in the world will simply bounce off your unreceptive mind, and it is the subconscious that governs your emotional state.



For some this will at first seem a bit much, but it is very simple when put into practise and the best facet of it is that it works and works well.

Mind work may just be the edge that you need, its not difficult to do and best of all its free, so what have you got to lose.

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