

Back in 2004, a University of Chicago researcher named Judd Blaslotto, took three groups of students and tested

How many basketball free throws they could make.

After that round of testing, the first group did nothing.

The second group practiced making free throws every day for one hour.

And the third group simply visualized making free throws.

After 30 days, he brought the three groups back into the gym and re-tested their free throw shooting.

The first group didn't improve (as expected).

The second group improved by 24%.

And - get this - The third group improved by 23%

WITHOUT TOUCHING A BASKETBALL!

That experiment demonstrates the power of visualization
(also known as mental rehearsal or mental imagery)

Put simply, visualization is the process of creating an image in the mind. Not only does this technique help athletes to regulate the anxiety they experience during competition, but it also helps them stay confident, focused and mentally tough.

Ready to try this coaching technique with your team?



Here are some tips for getting started:

1. Practice makes permanent

Visualization is a skill, and, just like any skill that you perform in your sport, you will need to practice in order to perfect it. Visualization will never replace the need for physical practice, but rather can be effectively used to augment it. Try to spend 10 minutes working on visualization exercises at least once per week throughout the season.

2. Vivid is better

Try to make your visualization as vivid and realistic as possible by re-creating important details of your sport setting (e.g. practice and competition venues) in your mind's eye. By including details like the color of your opponents uniform or the sound of the spectators cheering, you will feel like you are really experiencing the performance that you are imagining. It's important for your players to see themselves executing a successful performance using all of the senses (e.g. see, feel, hear, taste, smell).

For example:

In Basketball:

Hitting a game-winning free-throw with no time left on the clock. Feel the sweat dripping down the back of your neck... hear the "SWISH" as the ball passes through the net, and the roar of the crowd.

In Volleyball: Putting away a ferocious spike over the outstretched hands of an opponent. Feel your hand smacking the ball with force... hear the blocker grunting to reach the ball, and your teammates celebrating and cheering the point won.

In Baseball:

Throwing a perfect curve-ball across the outside corner of the plate while the batter lunges wildly and misses. Smell the fresh cut grass on the field... hear the "SOCK" of the ball as it lands in the catcher's mitt.

3. Focus on quality... not quantity.

Because visualization is a mental skill, you will need to concentrate on creating and controlling your images, which can be tiring when you first get started. For this reason, it is best to begin your imagery training by visualizing high quality images for short periods of time, and then gradually increasing the time you spend imaging.

4. Plan your visualization.

Images of your sport can frequently pop into your head, but to really benefit from visualization, you should plan the content of your visualization to meet your current needs. Here are just some examples:

- A. If you are struggling to perform a certain skill or strategy in game situations, you should try imaging yourself performing that skill or strategy perfectly and confidently in an upcoming game.
- B. If you often let distractions get in the way, try imaging yourself staying relaxed and focused in the presence of those distractions.
- C. If you have problems handling nerves in competition, try to imagining yourself performing exactly the way you want to under those conditions that normally would make you nervous. Try these visualization techniques and watch your team's performance improve!

