

Lock into “The Zone” for Athletic Success!

Christopher Stankovich, Ph.D.

Advanced Human Performance Systems

www.drstankovich.com

“The Zone”

As an athlete I’m sure you already know about being “in the zone” and how awesome you play when you are locked into that magical mindset that allows your mind and body to be in synchrony – often resulting in some of your best games! The “zone” is known by psychologists as being in “flow,” or when you experience the optimal psychological mindset. Being in flow (or the zone) is when your focus is locked in, your attention span is directed and on-task, your motivation level is high, and your energy level is at a peak state.

When athletes learn how to get their minds into the zone, the result is efficient, often effortless movement and play – resulting in fewer mistakes and more peak athletic performances. In fact, some athletes have even told me they felt like they “couldn’t miss even if they tried to!”

The zone is not something magical, but instead comes about by taking control of your athletic training, being motivated to succeed, matching up against challenging competition (not too easy or too difficult), and perhaps most importantly moderating your arousal level while playing (i.e. calming down when you are nervous, and pumping up a little when you feel flat).

Why “The Zone” works

Quite simply, the zone works because it allows you to play the way you know how to and with a high level of intensity. Being in the zone also means you are “playing to win with great confidence, and are far less likely to “choke” during critical game situations! When you are not in the zone, it becomes much easier to get caught up in things that can beat up your confidence – like worrying about what people are thinking of you or even the bad game you had earlier in the week!

How to use “The Zone”

- First, it is vitally important that you compete against talent that is roughly the same as your own. Research studies show when we compete against easy competition we often get bored, and with too advanced competition we are likely to get overly-frustrated. The key is to play against challenging competition that will push you to become the best you can be!

- Journal notes about the times when you felt you were in the zone (the best time is immediately after a game or practice where this occurred). Try to look for patterns that are happening that may be helping you get in the zone – for example, maybe listening to that one favorite song moments before games has been helping put you in a really good emotional state and has helped get you in the zone.
- You must be focused on the task at-hand at all times and truly believe in yourself in order to get into the zone. Since it is quite likely you will sometimes get nervous during games, you must learn a skill (or two) that will help you relax when the pressure is high. Taking 2-3 really deep, cleansing breaths into your stomach is one sure-fire way to help!
- Love what you do! Research shows we are far more likely to get into the zone when we are intrinsically motivated (meaning we compete for the love of competing, not because somebody else wants us to).

Dr. Chris Stankovich, known as “The Sports Doc” for his segment on Ohio News Network and featured column in Columbus Parent magazine, is a national expert in the field of sport psychology and offers an entire line of peak performance educational training products for student athletes, coaches, and parents. Please visit www.drstankovich.com to learn more.

