

## ***Focus for Excellence in Athletics!***

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### ***Focus***

Arguably one of the most difficult things for athletes to do – especially younger athletes – is to maintain an appropriate level of focus when competing (while at the same time minimizing irrelevant focus). Your focus is your ability to maintain your attention level toward an object, thought, or action; good focus leads to athletic success, while poor focus leads to misplays, errors, and a host of other negative athletic consequences!

Different sports require different levels of focus; for example, a golfer will need a higher level of focus while mapping out a difficult putt compared to a offensive lineman in football who may only need to block the man in front of him on a particular play (and has much more room for error compared to the golfer). Regardless of sport, however, one thing is constant amongst all athletes: You must learn to focus on relevant factors (i.e. your assignment) and eliminate focusing on irrelevant factors (i.e. what happens if I fail?).

Relevant focus includes paying attention to what you need to do on the next play and what your role will be. Irrelevant focus would be paying attention to the crowd, thinking about the last play where you missed your assignment, or thinking about what you are going to do after the game!

For most athletes focus often becomes too wide during practice conditions (you might be bored and your mind wanders to what you will do after practice); whereas focus can become too narrow during competition (you want to make that one, perfect play and end up not playing confident, free, and natural). The key is during practice conditions – especially during boring, mundane drills – you must work very hard to keep your focus on relevant factors. Likewise, during competitions you must be careful not to over-analyze situations and instead trust that all your hard work has prepared you to be successful!

### ***Why focus works***

Appropriate focus on relevant factors is what will allow you to stay a step ahead of your competition and reach your full athletic potential! By minimizing “daydreaming” and keeping your head in the game, you will learn athletic skills more quickly, execute skills more efficiently in competition, and perhaps most importantly you won’t get caught up

paying attention to things that simply do not matter (i.e. what people are saying about you, the weather, the officials, etc.).

An extra “bonus” when it comes to focus is the odds of you getting injured while playing is dramatically reduced! Some research shows that many injuries occur in sports simply because athletes were not paying attention – resulting in an unanticipated collision that often leads to serious injury. On the other hand, keeping your mind focused will enable you to respond more quickly to impact and collisions, resulting in far fewer injuries!

### ***How to improve focus***

- Take out a sheet of paper and write down all the relevant factors you need to pay attention to when competing. Next, write down all the irrelevant factors that sometimes enter your mind when you are playing sports.
- Once you have your lists complete, try to develop strategies that will allow you to keep your focus on the relevant factors (i.e. the next play), while minimizing your focus on the irrelevant factors (i.e. your homework – yes it is important, but not during a game!).
- Ask your coaches and/or parents to give you a grade pertaining to your focus. Often others can evaluate our focus by simply watching us compete.
- Consider writing a cue word somewhere on your equipment to help with focus. For example, simply writing the word “focus” on a piece of your equipment will remind you what to do (other words work well, too).

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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](http://www.drstankovich.com) to learn more.

