

ATHLETE'S MENTAL EDGE WORKBOOK

MENTAL GAME
STRATEGIES FOR
OVERCOMING HIGH
EXPECTATIONS



WORKBOOK 1



MENTAL EDGE WORKBOOK 2

MENTAL GAME STRATEGIES FOR OVERCOMING HIGH EXPECTATIONS



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Mental Edge Workbook 1

Mental Game Strategies for Overcoming High Expectations

Session One Objective

You'll learn how to uncover harmful or strict expectations that undermines your confidence, and replace them with process goals or manageable objectives.

What You Need to Know

We know that strict or high expectations can undermine and suck the life out of confidence—and this is a good place to begin your mental training. Expectations cause you to feel pressure. They hurt your confidence level when you don't achieve them. Expectations cause you to focus too much on outcomes or results. They can trigger frustration when you think you are not performing up to your expectations.

Let's start with some definitions. Self-confidence and "expectation" are two different concepts. Expectations are *absolute needs or demands* that you place on yourself about the quality of your performance or desired outcomes. They are often unstated standards you have about how you *think you SHOULD* perform. Expectations cause you to judge the quality of your performance or how well you should do in a competition. Confidence is a belief you have about executing a task.

Expectations often come from four areas:

1. Demands about your score, times, results, or outcome
2. Demands about the quality of your performance (i.e. how good was the shot)

3. Demands about your mental game
4. What you think others expect of you and you adopt as your own

Examples of Common Expectations:

- I should not make any stupid mistakes.
- I should perform perfectly.
- I should not make any errors.
- My performance should always feel good.
- Other people expect me to win all the time.
- I should beat this opponent.
- I should be mentally tough all the time.
- I should never make mental mistakes.

Later, you'll list your own expectations for your sport.

Let's talk confidence. Self-confidence is the strength of your belief to perform or execute well. Confidence precedes your performance. For example, a quarterback might visualize a good pass in his mind and have a strong belief he will hit his receiver.

Confidence does not come from expecting you will do well, although many athletes think of it this way. The essence of confidence is void of self-judgments. You want to feel confident, but not judge the quality of your performance.

Let's start with a basic mental game principle or "formula for success." This formula is a preliminary mental skill that you'll want to master first.

A Mental Game Formula for Success

The objective is to perform without the demands and judgments caused by your high expectations (about performance or outcome). Instead, your objective is to perform with (1) high self-confidence, and (2) manageable objectives (or what we call process goals).

Thus, athletes with high self-confidence and the ability to focus on manageable objectives perform with a present, process focus instead of performing with the pressure and judgments associated with strict expectations.

Therefore, three steps in the formula are:

1. Be aware and flush out strict expectations (demands) that affect your self-confidence negatively (and create undue pressure).
2. Harness the power of confidence, and learn how to have high confidence that's void of expectation.
3. Replace high expectations with process goals. Process goals help you to focus on execution and performance in the moment. Your goal is to immerse yourself in process goals, while avoiding turning them into expectations.

How to Flush out Your Expectations

Let's start by asking a few questions to help you identify any expectations that limit your performance and mental game:

- What expectations, such as "I should beat _____ today" do you place on your performance? If you do NOT achieve these expectations, do you become upset, frustrated, or lose confidence in your ability?

- What absolute demands do you maintain about your performance, such as, “I *MUST* hit perfect shots today to win” that cause you to feel pressure during a competition?”
- What other demands do you place on your performance, and feel you should achieve based on past experiences, such as, “I can’t miss my shot on goal” or “I should be frustrated when I make errors on defense?” What unwritten expectations cause you to feel upset or frustrated if you do not reach them?
- What names do you call yourself (also called negative self-labels) or adopt that other people call you, such as “I’m a slow starter” or “I’m a streaky player.”
- What past situations cause you to make unfounded generalizations about your current game, such as, “I can never.... perform well on hot days?”
- What expectations do you feel from other people, such as coaches, teammates, or parents?

Examples of Common Expectations Athletes Maintain

Below is a list of common expectations you might have. You might have others similar to these.

See the Table on the next page.

Area	Expectations
Scoring, Outcomes, or Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I should score three goals per game. • I should score 15 points per game. • I should finish top three in every race. • I should go 4-for-4 at-bat. • My team should not lose a game this season.
The Quality of My Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I should not make any stupid mistakes. • I should perform perfectly. • I should not make any errors. • My performance should always feel good. • All of my shots should feel solid.
My Mental Game	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I should not get upset or frustrated. • I should execute a perfect pre-shot routine. • I shouldn't make any mental errors. • I should not be nervous before the game. • I should always feel confident.
What Others Expect of Me	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other people expect me to win all the time. • Others think I should beat certain teams or opponents. • Others think I should be the top scorer in the game. • Others think I should not make mistakes.

Exercise 1: What Are Your Expectations?

In the table below, write down your scoring, performance, as well as your mental game and expectations. Also, list any expectations you might feel from others, such as coaches. You might have one or more in each area of your game.

You can ask a coach or parent to help you with this exercise.

Area	Expectations
Scoring, Outcomes, or Results	1. 2. 3.
The Quality of My Performance	1. 2. 3.
My Mental Game	1. 2. 3.
What Others Expect of Me	1. 2. 3.

Your goal should be to perform without any expectations, good or bad. The objective of this session is to replace your expectations with more manageable tasks or process goals. Process goals help you to focus on small tasks that you execute everyday. They also keep you focused in the present moment, instead of thinking about future outcomes.

Replace Expectations with Process Goals

Using the expectations you listed in the workbook above, your task is to replace each expectation with a process goal.

Process goals can be based on your performance, as well as your mental game. You can use these two areas:

- **Performance goals:** focus on the quality of your performance.
- **Mental game goals:** focus on having a good mental game.

What are good process goals?

1. They help you to focus your mind on executing certain skills or areas of your game (offense, defense, transition, etc.) successfully.
2. They help you to focus on the here and now, and not on results.
3. They help you to focus on what *you want to do* instead of avoiding failures or mistakes (i.e. don't lose the ball).
4. They are simple to think about and usually not technical or related to mechanics during competition.

Your process goals should be manageable and based on your current performance, not the absolute ideal. Don't set process goals that are hard to obtain. Process goals are things you can do 10 out of 10 times. They are not typical goals; instead they help you to focus on what's important in your performance.

Your task is to replace expectations with process goals. Here's an example:

- **Expectation:** "I expect to hit the ball perfectly and not make any mistakes."
- **Process Goal:** "I will pick smart targets and trust my strokes."

Examples Process Goals

Below are a few examples of process goals to help you get started with coming up with some of your own.

Track & Field

- Commit to a race plan
- Have good rhythm on my run
- Relax and run freely
- Enjoy the challenge
- Run at a 5-minute-per mile pace
- Engage legs before arms when throwing discus
- Use a pre-event routine before the high jump

Tennis

- Attack opponent's forehand
- Stay composed after errors
- Visualize each serve
- Stay aggressive
- Aim for a high first-serve percentage
- Take ball early on return serve
- Mix up the shots

Soccer

- Focus on performance cues
- Be in the moment, and let go of mistakes
- Take people on 1v1
- Shoot decisively when there is the chance
- Watch the ball when defending

Basketball

- Relax and have fun
- Fully commit when deciding to shoot
- Block out distractions

- Follow through on shots
- Keep feet moving on defense
- Get open for teammates

Exercise 2: Replace Expectations With Process Goals

Now it's your turn, please complete the table below. Write your expectations in the left column and an example of a process goal that would take the place of your expectations in the right column.

Expectations	A Better Option – Process Goal
<p style="text-align: center;">Outcome</p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>	<p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">My Performance</p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>	<p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">My Mental Game</p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>	<p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>

Others' Expectations	
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

Summary

Your new *Formula for Success*: "I'll perform without the mental handcuffs of expectations and replace them with (1) high confidence and (2) manageable objectives (process goals)."

Your first step is to uncover and then replace expectations with process goals, in order to keep self-confidence at a high level. Keep in mind that your process goals may change each day depending on the prior day. The idea is that what you focus on, you'll improve.

Take the first step now by identifying the expectations that undermine your confidence and limit your performance. This step alone will make a big difference in your mental game.

Above all else, keep it simple. Set two process goals to focus your attention on, such as committing to your strategy, instead of pressuring yourself to be perfect or win every time you compete.

Pregame Mental Preparation

You want to remind yourself of the mental skills you are working on this week to help you improve your mental game during competition.

1. Before each competition, note any expectations you are holding onto. Do your best to “park” your expectations (leave them in the parking lot), and replace them with process goals.
2. Before each competition, set two process goals for your **performance**, such as following through on shots. Focus on your process goals more than the score or outcome of the competition, or who's winning.
3. Before each competition, set two mental process goals to help you improve simple areas of your **mental game**, such as letting go of the last play and re-focusing on the next.

Post-Competition Mental Game Assessment

After your next competition, please answer a few questions about your mental game. It's best if you answer them on the same day as your competition. After you answer the questions below, ***please return your answers via email or fax.***

1. What are two things you did well today, in regards to your mental game and performance?
2. What are two things you would like to improve for next time?
3. What expectations, if any, did you notice about going into today's competition?
4. What process goals did you use for today's competition?
5. How well did you let go of your expectations and instead, focus on your mini-goals or process goals?
6. What did you learn about replacing your expectations with process goals that will help you in the future?