



Peak Performance

“Peak moments” is an all encompassing term used to describe a events such as peak experience, flow, peak performance, the zone, and the exercise high.

Experiences of peak performance greatly enhance the quality of life (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991)

Individuals experiencing Peak Performance feel:

- utter contentment
- high elation
- outstanding performance
- fun
- increased self-confidence
- increased motivation
- clear goals
- low anxiety
- enhanced sense of control
- and a variety of other feelings that add greatly to the quality of life

Emotional and performance states associated with Peak Performance:

- absorption
- detachment
- ecstasy
- power
- altered perceptions of time
- sense of unity

- » **Absorption**—Flow experiences occur most often when the individual is totally immersed in the activity. This has been described as being a “cocoon of concentration” by Williams (1986) and Murphy (1977). Individuals experiencing peak performance maintain a complete focus on the task at hand.
- » **Detachment**—During peak performance, individuals are not conscious of their performance. Actions are free and spontaneous, rather than forced and continually monitored. Participants are often detached from their environment and report complete silence around them, with the exception of important cues from officials, teammates and coaches. Negative self-critique is virtually non-existent. Team sport athletes feel in control without having to be involved in every ball, play, or shot. Individual sport athletes maintain a sense of control without the need to “force it.”
- » **Ecstasy**—A feeling of euphoria is often associated with peak performance. This feeling is associated with high levels of internal, or intrinsic, motivation, and is a major reason some athletes continue to participate.

- » **Power**—Individuals perceive themselves as having an abnormal amount of power during moments of peak performance. This is usually described as a sense of “being able to do no wrong.” Athletes experiencing peak performance have complete confidence that they are able to execute in any situation, without losing their sense of strategy for the game. That is, just because a basketball player feels confident in making a half-court shot doesn’t mean he/she won’t pass the ball farther up the floor to look for a smarter shot.
- » **Altered perceptions of time**—During these moments of intense concentration, participants reveal experiences of time speeding up, or slowing down. Altered spatial perceptions have also been revealed—things may seem closer or larger than they actually are.
- » **Sense of unity**—Flow states are characterized by a feeling of oneness with the performance environment. Also, they involve the meshing of the physical and mental. This harmonizing produces a very special feeling of an integrated whole.

How to facilitate Peak Performance

Although athletes experience Peak Performance only about 15 percent of the time, there are a few things you can do to make it more likely. Remember, though, that it’s not magic. You have to practice these mental techniques just like you practice physically. It’s unrealistic to expect to be “in the zone” if your body’s not used to doing what it takes!

- Maximize physical practice—If you’re not giving 100 percent in practice, you can’t expect it in competition.
- Have a clear idea of what you want to accomplish before the practice or competition begins—Set SMARTS goals.
- Address outside distractions and worries before practice or competition—This way, you’re able to devote all your attention to your game.
- Develop and use a pre-performance routine to make sure you’re mentally and physically prepared
- Create short verbal or physical cues to help you get back on track after distractions—These **MUST** be practiced before they can be implemented in competition. Examples include “next play,” “recover,” or a tap on the thigh to refocus attention.
- Build self-confidence by recalling what you do well **AT LEAST** as often as what you should work on.
- Choose to be optimistic, nonjudgmental and frame your self-talk in the positive. An example is to say “I have to stay balanced and on top” instead of “I can’t throw a strike.”
- Have a “go-to” skill that always makes you feel confident. If you always feel confident in your putting, then focus on that and make it the best possible. Chances are, the excitement and confidence you feel about putting well will wash over into the other parts of your game.
- Use imagery to rehearse what playing great feels like. Remember to use all the senses, not just sight. There’s a specific sound that’s made when a club strikes a golf ball just right...that’s what you want to hear during imagery. Likewise, there are smells—like the way your hand smells after handling a basketball—and tastes—like the dirt that gets into your mouth after a great slide into second—that make the imagery as realistic as possible. The better your imagery, the more your brain and body have to work with during competition.