



5 tips to mentally prepare your team for optimum play

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Mental preparation should be a part of any lacrosse coach's playbook. Much of the work I do toward mental preparation is to mimic conditions players will experience in games and train in those conditions. I find this is most effective to prepare them for the mental rigors of a game.

Below are some of my tips to help mentally prepare your players.

1. **Train your players under the conditions in which they will play.** Do lots of high-pressure drills in practice to mimic game situations. This will help them maintain composure and poise once the game starts. Even simulate crowd noise or defensive noise by placing "yellers" around a drill to rattle your players – or rather, to train them not to get rattled.
2. **Condition your players appropriately during practice.** Maintaining fitness goes a long way towards player confidence when it comes to game time. A tired player is a player that is not mentally sharp or focused and will make mental mistakes. A fit player can use their mind much more effectively.
3. **Train your players to accept that mistakes are part of the sport.** I always say in drills, if you make a mistake, make it full speed. Or, in the words of longtime Harvard coach Carole Kleinfelder, "Be decisive. Be decisively wrong, but be decisive." Players will make mistakes, make wrong choices, but if they make them full speed and you allow for those mistakes as part of the game, they will be more confident in their abilities and more willing to take risks.
4. **Develop a ritual to move on when players make a mistake.** This team ritual is a great tool, because while the players may have some fun with it, it helps them to move on if they make a mistake. I have used the "flush it" metaphor in which players make the motion of flushing to toilet to get rid of the mistake. I have also used the "brush it off" metaphor where players wipe the mistake off their shoulder so they don't carry it around for the rest of the game. They can also encourage one another if they make a mistake to "flush it."
5. **Teach your players how to visualize.** Visualization is a great tool to help players prepare themselves individually for competition. Whether it is the night before or on the bus, they can walk themselves through game situations mentally in which they envision themselves doing it all right. This takes practice, and probably someone to teach you how to do it, but it is a great tool.

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