

Opening Your Mental Toolbox

As we embark on the start of the running racing season in South Florida I wanted to share one of my most influential training tools with you: Visualization & Imagery. I hope you will practice and perfect this technique for yourself and hopefully have one of your most fulfilling and successful seasons to date.

Psychology in sport has been used much before it ever became popular and by nearly every sport in every country. The value of harnessing the power of the mind in physical efforts was discovered long ago. The world's best coaches and athletes alike came to realize that the best physical preparations in the world aren't worth much if the athlete is not mentally able to take advantage of those physical preparations.

The initial (and most important) step in the Visualization/Imagery process is having a good plan. Your workout or race plan should be clear, concise, and simple. While it is important to aim high your plan should also have some foundation in the results of your previous workouts and races.

In your training prior to the big workout (i.e.: first 20 Miler) or race, try to visualize how the anticipated event is going to feel. I often will do this in my last quality workout before an important race. As I am completing the last 1/3 of the workout I pretend I am in the race...feeling the discomfort but managing it successfully and effortlessly, keeping my thoughts positive and staying alert. I visualize (with eyes open) the crowd at the finish, other competitors, and myself crossing the tape (as I take my last step in the workout) in victorious fashion. Doing this in workouts prior to your event, you offer your mind a "mental movie" and all it has to do is "replay" during the event itself to replicate the positive outcome you already created. When you are actually running the race or the important workout, concentrate on how diligently you trained to run that pace and how you feel the same as you did in all of your previous workouts. This will give you the encouragement and the belief that you can succeed. You are "mentally prepared" via having thoughts and feelings while competing that replicate what you've thought and felt during your training.

There is a very successful Visualization and mental prep process that has been developed and proven to be successful by collective sports psychologists. I have listed it for you in a separate column so that you can cut it out and use it over and over as you need to before workouts and races. Practice this technique 4 times per week for at least 3 weeks and I guarantee you will see results from it. When you do please write in (sfuhl@aol.com) and let me know. I would love to celebrate your successes with you!

I leave you with a quote that encompasses the message of this article in one sentence:

"You Become What You Think About All Day Long."

-Earl Nightingale

All the best!

-Sonja

