

SELF-CONFIDENCE and PEAK PERFORMANCE

by Susan Milam

An athlete's level of self-confidence is often a determining factor of whether or not he or she has a peak performance. However, an athlete's positive self-confidence doesn't just happen, it has to be developed over many years. It is often the result of a positive learning environment and positive self-talk. A positive learning environment is important in the development of self-confidence because people learn by watching. Being negative is bound to bring on negative self-talk, low self-confidence and a poor attitude.

The athlete's self-talk is also important when competing. To have high self-confidence, the athlete's self-talk must be positive. If the athlete tends to think negatively, they can easily lose self-confidence.

According to the leading sports psychologist the essence of confidence is playing with your eyes. The eye of the confident athlete focuses on the objective allowing the brain and body to react. The confident athlete lets his or her body and brain run on "auto pilot."

One way to start building self-confidence is to improve physical skill. Physical skill typically improves through practice. There are two general types of practice that can be used, blocked practice and random practice. With blocked practice, the athlete practices the skills over and over. It is a great technique used for beginners to help build self-confidence. The other type of practice is referred to as random practice, and tends to be used with more skilled athletes. This is where the athlete practices different skills. For example, one would practice long shots in golf and then go to the practice green and practice putting and then move to the fringe and practice chipping. With this technique the athlete may not see immediate improvement, but it will become apparent in competition or actual play.

Another way to improve self-confidence is through goal setting. When setting goals be sure that the athletes set team and individual goals. Individual goals play an important part in developing self-confidence. If the athlete sets realistic and attainable weekly goals, improvement in self-confidence becomes more apparent.

A different method for increasing self-confidence involves imagery. Using imagery, the confident golfer imagines swinging properly, hitting the ball correctly, and the ball sinking into the hole.

Finally, here are some tips to maintain positive thoughts and confidence: To play as well as one can, a player **MUST** focus his or her mind on the shot being played, in the here and now, and forget about past mistakes. Almost all athletes would be better if they forgot about the score, and just played their game. If athletes focus on performance, they cannot perform as well.

Building confidence can do wonders for athletes. With practice and positive reinforcement, athletes can achieve their peak performance. Remember that the confident

athlete is the successful athlete.

Reference:

Rotella, Dr. Bob, Bob Cullen. *Golf Is A Game of Confidence*. Printed in the USA, 1996: Simon and Shuster.

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