



MENTAL TOUGHNESS

- MENTAL TOUGHNESS IS LEARNED, NOT INHERITED

The same way the body gains endurance, speed, strength, and skill (physical ability) through hard and *persistent* physical training, the mind gains determination, awareness, decision-making ability, and emotional self-discipline through “exercising” the mind – by learning and practicing a state of mind that is focused and conducive to winning. Knowledge is the key. One cannot better a problem that one does not know exists. When a player realizes the need to examine his or her mental toughness, a highly neglected component of the game, then the player can also begin to realize his or her potential as an athlete.

One retiring and frustrated athlete is quoted with saying “I realize I have all the talent and skill, but unfortunately, I was not *born* with the necessary competitive instincts”. The problem here may not only be a sense of helplessness, but a lack of knowledge. Perhaps this player could have avoided early retirement by becoming exposed to the type of knowledge that instills self-awareness of one’s thoughts and emotions – to learn how to overcome one’s mental weaknesses. It is indeed possible, and very necessary for the athlete committed to becoming the best player he or she can possibly be.

James E. Loehr (a sports psychologist) offered different dimensions of “mental toughness” that the best athletes in the world seem to have in common based on his research. Remember, these mindsets *can* be learned and practiced:

- **Self Motivation and Self-Direction**
An individual who does not need to be prodded or pushed by another. This individual is involved because he or she wants to be involved, not for anybody else.
- **Positive but Realistic**
An individual who is not a complainer or a critic. This is someone who keeps a positive mood in the face of a challenge. Others build off his or her enthusiasm. The focus is on success and what *can* happen; and never on failure or fault.
- **Emotionally Mature**
Poor emotional control leads to fouls, yellow/red cards, and lowered team morale. More importantly, the lack of emotional control leads to lack of focus in the game. Anger, frustration, and fear must be controlled, or they most

certainly will control you.

- **Composed Under Pressure**
Not only is this individual composed under pressure, but he or she welcomes the challenge. A test is not perceived as a threat, and the player is motivated to achieve rather than afraid to fail.
- **Highly Energetic and Ready for Action**
This individual is capable of getting pumped up and energized no matter how he or she feels and no matter how bad or 'meaningless' the situation. Fatigue, personal problems, and plain bad luck are overcome through mental toughness.
- **Determined**
The will to succeed dominates this person's thoughts. He or she demonstrates relentless effort in pursuit of a goal or vision. Setbacks don't impede the amount of effort this individual puts forth. A 'rebound mentality' dominates.
- **Mentally Alert and Focused**
Long and intense periods of concentration characterize this individual. Distractions don't shatter his or her focus. Attention is directed toward the things that matter or are most relevant to performance, like decision-making on the pitch.
- **Extremely Self-Confident**
This individual doesn't care what others think of him or her. He or she is self-assured of his or her ability, and yet humble enough to know there is always room to improve. When a new goal is set, there is no doubt in this individual's mind that it will be achieved.
- **Fully Responsible**
This is someone who takes responsibility for his or her own actions. 'Excuse' is not in this person's vocabulary. Mistakes are okay, but in the same breath must be learned from. Ultimately, this individual knows that whatever happens, he or she is in control of his or her own actions and responsible for the consequences, both good and bad.

The athletes that fit this profile are those that dominate the world of sports. An athlete cannot become the best he or she can be without appreciating "mental toughness". By simply becoming aware of what mental toughness is in words is not enough. Mental toughness MUST be practiced to begin experiencing the rewards involved, which in turn reinforces the behavior. Mental toughness can also come from the team as a whole, where the players themselves create a climate of having pride in their character so that every teammate demands it from each other.

Those who abide to the highest standards of mental toughness and character are those to who go on to the highest levels of play and life achievement.