

The sports industry has changed tremendously over the last few decades. It has grown into a multi-billion dollar industry that both influences and captivates us year-round. Our role models are often athletes who inspire us with possibilities and motivate us to achieve high levels of performance. Sometimes it can be difficult to separate our own athletic experience and goals from those publicized. High school athletics can be especially challenging. It is often where “playing for fun” can morph into “playing to win”. Athletes are stronger and smarter and stakes are much higher – especially if one is competing for college scholarships.

What is recognized on the field (or court, mat, river, course, pool, floor, etc.) is two dimensional compared to what is actually taking place. Spectators see the physical execution of skills; they cannot see into an athlete’s mind for the full three dimensional performance. So, if no one can see the mental component, why is it so important? In fact, an athlete’s mental skill affects every single part of his performance, as well as his preparation and his response after a competition. Because it is not as recognizable, it is easy to neglect the mental aspect of athletics in favor of the seemingly more obvious gains in muscle mass or speed. Unfortunately, all of the muscle, speed, and technical skill in the world will not help an athlete who is mentally unprepared for competition.

Having “mental strength” is not a new concept. Athletes have publicly attributed successes to the mental game and blamed poor performances on a weak mental state for years. It sounds simple and logical – yet, how do you train yourself for optimal mental strength? Athletes work with coaches to enhance technical skills and trainers for physical improvements; it makes sense to have another coach to help with the mental training that benefits all sports and performance situations. Learning to excel in less obvious areas than speed and strength can give you a powerful “secret” weapon and may be the difference between your performance and others’. Some areas that can be improved with training and are critical to consistent athletic success include:

- Confidence
- Perseverance
- Concentration
- Effort
- Motivation
- Intensity
- Strength
- Awareness
- Poise
- Conviction
- Trust
- Composure
- Focus
- Balance
- Determination
- Consistency

Sports are not just “games” – they are valuable lessons in goal-setting, teamwork, personal abilities and identity formation. These lessons are clearer and longer lasting because they are not just learned but practiced and performed. Learning to recognize them can assist in capitalizing on their usefulness even further. A licensed therapist may be able to assist athletes when they are faced with inevitable challenges in sports, such as:

- Injury
- Defeat/Victory
- Position change
- Being benched
- Being a captain
- Losing/Achieving starter status
- Coach change
- Poor performance
- Respecting your teammates
- Drugs and alcohol presence
- Trash talk
- Athletics vs. academics
- End of season/career

Being a student athlete is both a tough and rewarding balancing act. There are abundant benefits to be gained, which can bring lifelong value. Often the amount of work you invest is reflected in both your sport and in other aspects of life. Please call if you would like assistance with improving your game and other areas of competition and performance.