



Featured
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There are two outs in the bottom of the ninth and the bases are loaded. The crowd is loud, and you are stepping to the plate. We have all been there before or in similar high-pressure situations. How do you let your talent shine and avoid having your performance sabotaged by nerves and anxiety?

You need to ensure the following tools are in your tool box the next time your heart rate climbs and your mind starts to wander in such a situation.

1. Find The power of oxygen.

Use a deep belly breath or slow shrugging of the shoulders to relax your upper body. Remember, calmness in and tension out as you take slow breaths in between pitches or prior to stepping into the batter's box. Listening to yourself take slow, quiet breaths is a great way to calm your insides. Breathe in, rely on your power spot. Do the thing you do when you are feeling great and under control. (For example: Michael Jordan had the tongue sticking out of the side of his mouth when he was about to take his game to another level.) Ask your teammates and coaches about the personal body language you give off when you are performing well. The key to the power spot is to use it when things are getting tight. It might be the way you twirl your bat, or your neck twist between pitches or the licking of the lips when you are getting ready to hit. Whatever makes you feel good and drives your confidence level up should be your power spot you activate during any in-game crisis.

2. Stick to your routine.

All players have a pre-pitch routine they follow. Stay with your routine (touch the plate, fiddle with your batting gloves, adjust your helmet) throughout the game so your mind is convinced that each in-game situation should be treated the same. Staying with your own pre-pitch routine (the same goes for pitchers and fielders) develops confidence and allows your in-game performance to become consistent.

3. Self-Talk.

Create your own personal pep talk. Your personal pep talk should be a simple, positive phrase that becomes the last message your mind receives before the pitch. "See the ball." "I am the best." "Trust." "Slow Down." "Quick hands." "Easy and early." These are all examples of a hitter's self-motivating phrases. In the same way you learn not to swing at bad pitches, you must learn to not choose bad thoughts.

4. Walk the walk.

No matter how nervous or anxious you may be inside, never let the opposing team sense that you are defeated or losing confidence. Keep your head and shoulders up and maintain eye contact with the pitcher as much as possible. Enter the batter's box with a winning swagger and let all those watching believe that you are the greatest hitter in the universe at the moment.

5. Play like you were six again.

The first team that relaxes typically wins. Remember when you played T-ball and you had no care in the world and you never got caught up with the need to excel? When you go back and play the game like a little kid, good things happen. Your moves become natural, you smile more and you're less concerned about results. The next time you get caught up in the importance of the game, shake yourself and revert back to the days when you chased butterflies in the outfield and nothing was serious!

6. Use your toilet and flush.

You need to learn to quickly get rid of parts of the game that you don't like. The first strike of the at-bat or the early-inning error are examples. Create your own personal toilet on the field and learn to flush away the negative act that you need to let go of before it affects the rest of the game. Learn to flush quickly and often during the game so your focus level and thoughts stay in the present.

7. You are what you see.

Imagine hitting a line drive (or should we say "frozen rope") in the on-deck circle, or your textbook swing approaching the opposing pitcher's best pitch. Your mind is a powerful machine; make the images as real as possible and your body will try to copy the image.

8. AFC:

A powerful acronym for Analyze, Flush, Confidence. After each swinging strike or bad take, go through a simple thought process of thinking about what you just did and how to improve on it, learn to flush the bad result out of your head quickly and then believe that you are the greatest hitter in the universe as you await the next pitch.

9. Stay Visual:

Once the game starts, pay attention to focusing on the ball and the field of play. The harder you look, the less you will see. Catch yourself from over-focusing on the pitch when hitting and be more aware of the big-picture view on defense to give you better field awareness.

Sharpen the tools described during practice and individual skills training. Tools that have never been taken out of the toolbox have little chance of working in games. Confidence comes from trusting your preparation and sticking to your routine.