



Imagery

Imagery is one's ability to create an experience in their mind. Our brains interpret these experiences as identical to the actual experience. This ability allows us to practice physical skills, mental skills, and strategies without actually having to be in the playing or training environment.

Imagery can be used to reinforce old skills, learn new skills, and practice strategies to overcome obstacles. Also, it can be used to remember and reinforce past successes, all without leaving the comfort of your own home.

- » If you are anxious about an upcoming performance you can recall past positive experiences, reinforcing your self-confidence in your ability to perform successfully.
- » You can imagine possible obstacles to your success and how you can overcome them with a successful strategy and mental practice.

For imagery to be effective you must be able to 1) control the image (make it do what you want it to do) and 2) produce the most vivid image as possible (use all your senses to make it realistic).

CONTROLLABILITY

- » Is the ability of an individual to imagine exactly what he/she wants to imagine and the ability to manipulate the image.
- » The image needs to be controlled so that the image produces the intended result of practicing physical skills, reinforcing self-confidence, or overcoming possible obstacles.
- » If you intend for an image to be your best reflection of a skill and it turns out to be a failed attempt, then the lack of controllability causes unintended negative effects (e.g., reduction in self-confidence).

VIVIDNESS

- » Relates to the clarity and detail an individual is able to create when using imagery.
- » In order to receive the maximum benefit from imagery, the image needs to incorporate as much relevant sensory information as possible. This means you need to incorporate all relevant sensory information (e.g., what you see, hear, smell, taste, feel, and the relative position of your body in space).
- » So, if you are imagining your perfect golf swing you need to use all of your senses, imagine all the little details of the course, what can you see, hear, the feel of the club in your hand, the smell of the grass, the wind against your face, and the sensation of your body as you swing. All of these sensory signals reinforce the image and make the imagery more effective.

TIPS FOR PRACTICING IMAGERY

A good way to start the processes of learning imagery is to first learn the diaphragmatic breath:

- » Sitting or laying down comfortably, place one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach. Now, breathe in slowly through your nose so that your stomach moves against your hand. Your hand on your chest should remain relatively still. Now, exhale tightening your stomach muscles allowing your hand on your stomach to fall as you exhale, and repeat.

Once you have become comfortable with the diaphragmatic breath, try incorporating it. Begin to imagine people and things with which you are very familiar:

- » Imagine the faces of the people you know well. See the color of their eyes, the texture of their hair, the contours of their face, their cheeks, their chin, and their neck. What can you smell?
- » Now imagine the places that you are familiar with, imagine you're in your home. Take a look around, notice all the details, what do you see? Run your hand across the furniture, what does it feel like, what does it look like? Are there any smells coming from the kitchen? Can you feel the floor beneath your feet, is it carpet, wood, tile, is it warm, cold? Absorb as much of the image as you can, use all of your senses, feel yourself moving around in the room, what do you see, hear, smell, and feel?

Imagery, like all skills, takes practice. So as you improve at the exercises above, you can begin to incorporate your sport:

1. Imagine yourself on the field, court, or course in uniform and ready to play.
2. Add the sounds and the smells you're likely to experience during practice and competition (e.g., fans, teammates, freshly cut grass, popcorn, etc.).
3. Use imagery to practice basic skills and activities (e.g., throwing, swinging, catching, putting, etc.).
4. When your control of the image is good, begin to make the skills and activities more complex (e.g., play an entire golf hole, imagine turning a double play, hitting a pitchers best pitch, etc.)