



CIAC COACHES UPDATE

CONNECTICUT INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETIC CONFERENCE

February 2014 Volume IV Issue 11 Dr. Bob Lehr, Editor

By the time you get your February copy of Update the Sochi Winter Olympic Games will be completed. The article in this issue of Update relates to how the top-level athletes in Sochi have prepared. There are several concepts that high school coaches will be able to take from the article and use it with their respective student-athletes. To simply get across to a high school athlete the knowledge of how much training went into the effort to make the Olympic team would be worthwhile.

The winter championships all upon us and the spring season will not be far behind. Good luck to all the winter sports coaches.

Bob Lehr - Editor



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Shining in Sochi: Mental Toughness at the Winter Olympics

Jim Afremow, Founder Good to Gold Medal, PLLC

The eyes of the world will be on Sochi, Russia, for seventeen thrilling days from February 7 through February 23. Understandably, for those two and a half weeks the Olympians are likely to feel as if they are being put under a giant microscope. The athletes will have to overcome major mental challenges during the Games to get—and stay—in the right frame of mind to succeed, all while simultaneously dealing with media scrutiny and public fanfare. Here are four mental keys all participants will have to master in order to perform at their peak level:

1. Keep a laser-like focus in the face of major distractions.

Distractions will be plentiful during the Games, and they can include such diverse factors as the Olympic Village, relationship concerns, safety threats, political issues, media demands, social media, housing problems, different/unfamiliar foods, and the mass of spectators. The key for successful athletes will be to maintain discipline at the right times (mind on performance) while also knowing when it is time to unwind (mind off performance).

Olympians can, and should, take a moment to fully enjoy the total experience because involvement in the event is itself a well-deserved reward. However, when it comes time to compete, they must be dialed-in immediately before and throughout their performances. In competition, this requires that athletes focus fully on what they have to do in the moment, not what the final outcome might be or any other extraneous factors. They must concentrate on their execution to achieve the desired result.

2. Maintain supreme, unwavering confidence.

In a passage from my new book *The Champion's Mind: How Great Athletes Think, Train, and Thrive*, Duncan Armstrong, an Olympic gold medalist in swimming, vividly explains the challenge at hand: "When you get to the Olympics and represent your country, you're not just facing athletes who have prepared for the past twelve months, two years, four years, or even ten years. You're facing highly motivated, very talented, uncompromising, and deadly serious people who have dreamed and prepared for this particular event their whole lives!"

The successful Olympian must respect their competition, but at the same time respect their own capabilities even more. Olympians who energetically embrace competition will meet the challenge, rather than becoming demoralized or overwhelmed by their proximity to rising stars or established legends in their events. Participants should view the Games not only as a great challenge, but as a special opportunity to put all of their training to use and showcase their immense talent. As Herb Brooks, coach of the 1980 U.S. Olympic "Miracle on Ice" team said to his athletes, "You were born to be a player. You were meant to be here. This moment is yours."

3. Conquer all fears and frustrations.

Murphy's Law states that if things can go wrong, they will go wrong. Over the course of their history the Games have encountered virtually every possible adverse situation—from minor delays to major tragedies. In contrast to the Summer Games, weather elements typically play a larger role at the Winter Olympics. Skiers and biathletes, for instance, must often cope with the unpredictability of the weather, such as freezing temperatures, heavy snowfall, and visibility problems.

Athletes will be doing their best to stay in a positive frame of mind regardless of any unforeseen events that occur. To accomplish this, Olympians should decide in advance to under-react to anything negative or surprising that might happen, to always expect the best but be mentally prepared for everything. Rolling with the punches and emotionally detaching from all things outside their immediate control will be essential. As author and attorney Leonard Scheff advises, "When angry, count to Zen."

4. Bringing one's intensity to the right level when needed.

After years of anticipation, the Games have finally arrived. It is easy for athletes to get too excited in the days prior to their event, wasting precious mental and physical energy as a result. They might also forget to protect their rest and recovery time and maintain a steady sleep schedule. Proper energy management is crucial for all competitors.

Though Sochi may represent an unfamiliar environment for the participant, what they must remember is that the physical task of optimizing one's performance is always the same. Therefore, Olympians should stick to their pre-performance and in-performance routines as much as possible. There is a natural tendency to speed everything up when faced with perceived pressure; however, Olympians should do their best to slow things down, especially if they find themselves rushing—whether while training, talking, walking, or eating. Maintaining consistent breathing is also vital in keeping the mind calm and the body tension-free.

All the years of physical training are now in the books. Olympians must trust their training and preparation completely. They must allow their bodies to do what they have been trained to do—nothing more, nothing less. The characteristics of mental toughness outlined above will put each athlete in a position to excel. Using these keys, the pressure of the Olympics will be effectively channeled into a winning performance, giving the athlete the greatest chance to shine in Sochi. Remember, it takes tremendous pressure to produce rare diamonds!

*Dr. Jim Afremow is a sports psychology specialist, licensed professional counselor, and the author of *The Champion's Mind: How Great Athletes Think, Train and Thrive* (Rodale, January 2014). He is the founder of Good to Gold Medal, PLLC, a leading sports psychology coaching and consulting practice. To learn more about Dr. Afremow, including details regarding his services and products, please visit his website: www.goldmedalmind.net.*

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CONNECTICUT COACHING EDUCATION PROGRAM

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March 2014 CEU Module Offerings

Being offered at

CIAC OFFICE: 30 Realty Drive, Cheshire, CT

Thursday, March 13 - 2014 from 6-9pm

Module 8 - Strength & Conditioning Design for Interscholastic Athletic Programs

Friday, March 14 - 2014 from 6-9pm

Module 18 - Dealing with the College Bound Athlete

Saturday, March 15 - 2014 from 8:30-11:30 am

Module 10 - Gender Equity and Diversity Awareness

Saturday, March 15 - 2014 from noon-3pm

Module 7 - CIAC Guide to the Role and Responsibility of a Coach

Saturday, March 15 - 2014 from 3-6pm

Module 17 - Dealing with Parents of Athletes

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