



# GOLDEN PANTHER POWER

Maximize Physical and Mental Power Using Performance Enhancing Strategies

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## The Art of Confidence

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Athletes have long recognized a relationship between confidence and performance. Sometimes it appears that only the greatest athletes have access to that magical confidence, while all other inferior beings can only wish for it. Fortunately, this is wrong! Everyone can increase their level of confidence and perform better. Although confidence is difficult to define, it is usually described as thoughts, feelings and actions reflecting self-belief and expectations of success.

### Thoughts

Confident athletes entertain a rich variety of successful thoughts. The notion of failure

simply never occurs during competition.

### Feelings

Confident athletes believe deeply in their abilities, love challenges, and feel strongly that they will prevail.

### Actions

Confident athletes expect success and show it in their body language. They rarely give their opponent a confidence boost by appearing discouraged or threatened.

It is often asked what comes first, confidence or success? Although it is true that success

breeds confidence, it is equally so that confidence increases one's probability for success. Success is never certain, but self-doubt, negativity, and low expectations guarantee failure.

Belief in oneself prevents harmful distractions such as anxiety, allowing for a more efficient performance focus.

Confidence also adds security during slumps and helps the athlete sustain effort. Finally, self-belief prompts athletes to set higher performance goals, as greater achievements are expected and appear more attainable.

Athletes who lack confidence worry needlessly about mistakes, lose concentration, allow

dangerous levels of arousal to intrude, and hasten failure by giving up. After all, there is nothing to lose by trying.

Although confidence is desired by all, there is no replacement for competence. The most confident athlete in the world still needs skill and experience to succeed. Confidence just helps make everything go more smoothly, often providing the decisive competitive edge. Some describe the relationship between confidence and performance as an inverted U, similar to the relationship between arousal and performance. Maintaining an optimal level of confidence is important because over-confidence, or a false belief in one's ability, can also lead to reduced effort and performance.

Here are some techniques to help you develop and maintain confidence:

1. Frequently image successful performances.
2. Increase your level of physical fitness, as this will enhance your technique and self-image at the same time!
3. Beat up on players slightly below your level occasionally to keep confidence alive. Some players never learn to win or develop confidence because they are always overmatched.

4. Make a list of your strengths. Review this list regularly to remind yourself of how great you really are.

5. Eliminate negative thoughts and memories. When they occur, replace them with positive self-statements (e.g., "I'm at my best under pressure").

6. Have a general strategy going into each competition. Confidence will grow as your plan is executed.

7. Keep you head up and maintain positive body language regardless of the score. The way you act will often influence the way you and your opponent feel. Act confidently, be confident!

8. Improve on areas of weakness in practice so that you'll have more to believe in during competition.

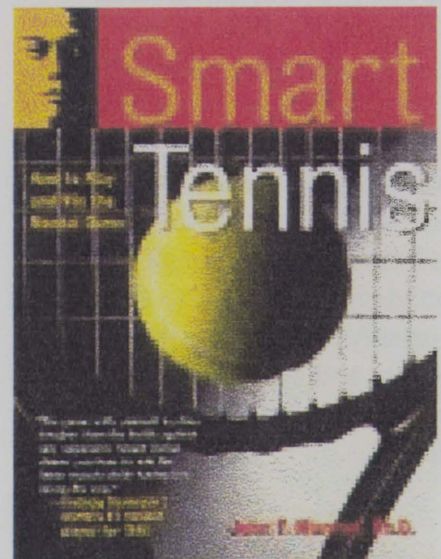
Effort invested in self-belief will help you reach your potential. Confidence is not a luxury reserved for the divine ... just another tool for success ... compliments of sport psychology. Believe in yourself and prosper!

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## Breathing

by Karlene Sugarman, M.A.

"Relax!" "Relax!" That's what coaches say to do, right? But how is this possible with the bases loaded, the game on the line and you at bat; or, the game tied in overtime with you going out to kick a field goal? One way to help during these stressful times is to use breathing techniques.

Being in a relaxed state is important to achieving optimal performance in any endeavor, not just sports. It's important when you're taking a test, giving a presentation, having a job interview, dealing with your children, etc. You name it, being relaxed will increase your productivity in it.

It is a vital stepping stone to peak performance. If you're not relaxed, everything you do will be a struggle. Relaxation provides a mind-body integration necessary for peak performance.

You can use relaxation skills at all stages of practice beginning, during and end. At the beginning as a way to get your mind clear and your body relaxed so you can get the most out of the practice session. During practice, you can use breathing skills to regain focus and slow your body down.

And, at the end of practice as part of cooling down to help you return to a balanced physical

state. Relaxation and breathing skills help improve your circulation (blood flow), which can help reduce the risk of injury and allows your body to get back to its normal state in a speedier fashion.

I am going to go over two basic relaxation techniques: circle breathing and a progressive relaxation session. These skills are necessary to perform at an optimal level in athletics, and they are the same sort of skills that are taught in stress management classes for businesses, and can be used in any facet of your life. It's important to note that the days of pep talks to psych up your team are over. Rigid, tight-jawed determination is not the key, a sense of relaxation and letting go is. During the track events at the Summer Olympics the commentators made note of how some of the runners looked so tense (their shoulders were being held higher and their facial muscles were tight). And, needless to say, these were not the athletes that went on to win. The athlete/team that is mentally and physically relaxed and has "quiet intensity" is the one that is going to come out on top.

Circle breathing is a great on-the-spot tool for athletes. Right before you throw a pitch, shoot a free throw, swing the bat, field a ball, kick a field goal all these tasks require great concentration and focus. The breathing will help you be better

prepared and allow you to keep your poise in tough situations. You are better able to read your environment if you are calm and relaxed. Mental poise and emotional control are key to your performing well and being successful.

The center of your body is right behind your belly button, and this is where you want to start your breath from. Starting from there (the center of your body), draw air in slowly through your nose, all the way up to your chest for a count of 4, hold it for a count of 2, then slowly exhale through your mouth for a count of 4. Let go of all tension and old energy, and completely clear your mind.

Focus only on your breathing. That is one deep breath. Approximately 5-10 of these in a row will help get you into a more relaxed state. Now, stop here and try to do a few deep breaths on your own before moving on. Go at your body's pace, it will tell you when to take another breath.

In the 1930s, Edmund Jacobson demonstrated that you can't be on opposite ends of the physiological and emotional spectrum (Tutko & Tosi). That is, an anxious mind cannot exist in a relaxed body; or, a quiet mind can not exist in a tense body. He introduced Progressive Muscle Relaxation. This entails tensing each muscle, holding it and then relaxing each muscle on the exhale. It's a loosening up and letting go mentality. The

letting go lets you know what absence of tension feels like. This type of relaxation skill gives you a heightened awareness of when and how you experience tension, this can then serve as a cue that you should do something to relieve the tension. You need to be able to communicate with your body and understand what it is trying to tell you.

## Guidelines for relaxation sessions

1. It is best to do your relaxation session at the same time every day (i.e., before practice/game and before you go to bed). Providing this consistency is very important because regular practice is essential if you want to reap the full benefits.
2. It's best if you have someone talk you through a scripted relaxation session the first few times until you become more familiar with it. Then you can do it yourself, or make a tape and play it whenever you want to do a relaxation session.
3. Find a quiet, comfortable place to relax, make sure you don't have any constricting clothing on and don't do it after you have just eaten a meal.
4. You can lay down, as long as you don't feel you will fall asleep. If that is the case, then sit up until you have disciplined yourself enough to lay down and remain awake. Sorry, sleeping does not equal practicing

relaxation skills!

5. Completely clear your mind of anything else. Now is the time to focus only on your breathing. At this point in time there is nothing more important than this relaxation session.

Start off with 5-10 deep breaths. Then, when you have taken all the proper measures to prepare yourself for a productive session, start with your feet and tense them as tight as possible and hold for a count of 4, then let go and have all the tension leave your feet, imagining all the tension and stress slowly leaving both your feet (this is on the exhale). Then, move on to your calves, again tensing them for a count of 4, then releasing all the tension from them. And, do the same for your thighs, buttocks, stomach, chest, hands, forearms, biceps, shoulders, back, neck, and facial muscles. All the while you should be doing your circle breathing.

Do a quick body scan and see if there is any tension left in your body. If you tend to carry your tension in your feet, then there is a chance that you will still be tense there. So, this is the time when you need to go back to that place and tense and relax these muscles again and again until you feel completely relaxed. When you are done, your whole body should feel sort of limp. This process should take about 20 minutes (10-15 after you have honed the skill). Take note, some athletes feel that this is not the

best technique to do right before practice or a game because it gets them too relaxed. It's a trial and error approach, as with your physical skills, use practice as your forum to first try this.

Breathing techniques are so simple that I think they are many times overlooked. These are such powerful tools, yet many players have yet to buy in and take the time to perfect these skills. The team that is educated about breathing and its impact on performance, and is able to recognize and control its own arousal states is the team that is going to be the most successful.

They are the ones that are able to keep their wits about themselves and reach a state of "relaxed concentration." Using relaxation skills can improve your state of mind, both on and off the playing field if you take the proper time to learn and hone these skills.

*[Adapted from Chapter 9 of Winning the Mental Way, by Karlene Sugarman, M.A. Reprinted with permission of the author. For more information on this book you can contact Karlene directly at [karsug@pathlink.com](mailto:karsug@pathlink.com).]*

If you have any questions about articles contained in this newsletter, or you would like to schedule an individual performance enhancement consultation session, please contact Dr. Kate Kominars, Counseling and Psychological Services Center, 305-348-2434.