

Sport Psychology 2:
Developing Optimal
Focus for Gaelic
Football

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Coaches' comments

FOCUS!

*KEEP
CONCENTRATING!*

JUST LET IT GO!

*DON'T GET
DISTRACTED!*

*HIS HEAD JUST WASN'T
HERE TODAY!*



MENTAL CIRCUIT TRAINING FOR PEAK PERFORMANCE

STATION 2

ANXIETY
CONTROL

STATION 3

COMMUNICN

STATION 4

CONCENT^N

STATION 1

MOTIVATION

STATION 5

MENTAL
PREPARATION

STATION 8

KEEPING
CONTROL

STATION 6

SELF-
CONFIDENCE

STATION 7

COPING WITH
PROBLEMS



Top players develop optimal focus for

- 👉 training
- 👉 matches
- 👉 the season



AIMS OF WORKSHOP

- ☞ To provide an introduction to some theory behind focusing
- ☞ Identify practical strategies to develop optimal focusing



DEFINITIONS????????

☞ Attention

☞ Concentration

☞ Focus

☞ *“ the term ‘attention’ is one of the most notoriously vague theoretical constructs in psychology ”*

(Eysenck 1988 – p.9)

ATTENTION

-mental effort!

1) Ability to
'concentrate'
(generally)

2) Ability to
'zoom in'/'
focus on
specific task
relevant info

3) Ability to
'divide'
attention to
perform more
than one skill
at once

2) *Ability to 'zoom in'*

- ☞ Attention is like a 'spotlight'
- ☞ If not concentrating then can't process the information and act
- ☞ Spotlight can be broad or narrow
- ☞ **Need to focus on right things at the right time!**



3) Ability to divide attention

- ☞ Can we effectively pay attention to more than one thing at once?
- ☞ Concentration grid
- ☞ ‘Attention’ is a limited resource
- ☞ **Need to minimise/ deal with distractions**

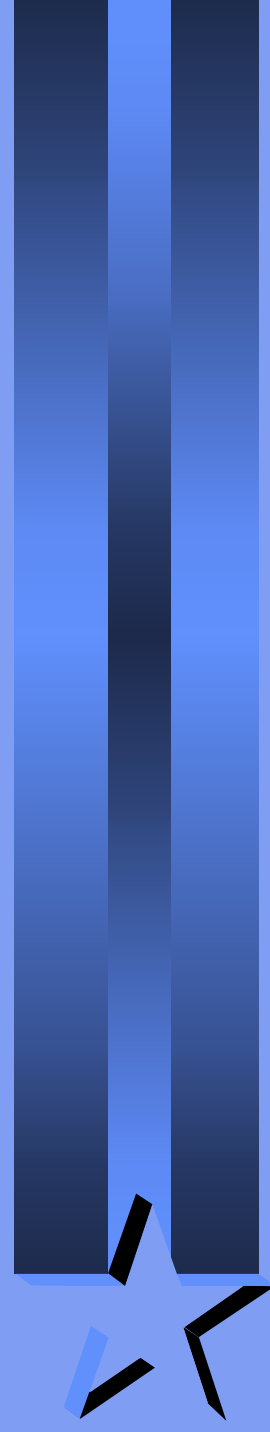
Sometimes we can pay attention to more than 1 thing

- ☞ If one of the skills is highly practiced
- ☞ If the skills use different senses





LIMITED
SPACE



“It was 3 all in the first set, and I had break points in every game. It should have been 4-2 at the least. I wasn’t focused, my mind was all over the place...All those thoughts are going through my mind. The problem is they are going through my mind on the court”

Martina Navratilova after defeat by Helena Sukova at US Open in 1993



TAKE
CONTROL OF
THE LIMITED
SPACE

Remember:

- ☞ **Need to focus on right things at the right time!**
- ☞ **Need to minimise/ deal with distractions**



Need to focus on the right thing at the right time!

3 STEPS:

 1) Know **WHAT** to focus on

 2) Know **WHAT NOT** to focus on (so
can catch self)

 3) Have **STRATEGIES** to help keep
focused on right thing at right time and
deal with distractions



*It's not about losing
concentration it is
about misplacing it!*



Group work

 Scenarios



Distractions

Internal	External
EG Negative thoughts Shaky	EG Crowd Score Team-mates





Control the
controllables!



Cope with the
uncontrollables!

Strategy 1 - Know what should be focused on

- ☞ Are players/ coaches aware of what they should be focused on?
- ☞ Use scenarios like we did (*what ifs?*)
- ☞ Positive coaching
 - ◆ Don't think about a **pink elephant**
 - ◆ 'don't miss' Vs 'strong technique'

Strategy 2 – COPE EFFECTIVELY WITH DISTRACTIONS

- ☞ ‘COPE WITH THE UNCONTROLLABLES’
- ☞ Ignore and Refocus
- ☞ Take control of the content of the limited space in your head

Strategy 2 – FOCUSING CUES

☞ Reminders to ‘switch on’ or ‘refocus’

☞ **1) VERBAL**

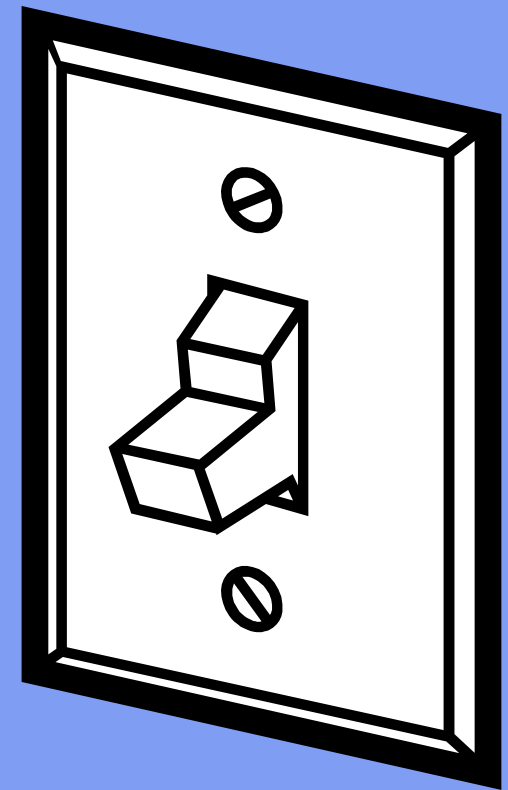
◆ ‘focus’/ ‘ready’/ ‘smooth’

☞ **2) VISUAL**

◆ Staring at writing on the ball

☞ **3) PHYSICAL**

◆ Wiping hand on shirt/ take a deep breath



Strategy 3 - ROUTINES

☞ Pre-match/ Pre-kick/ Pre-training

☞ **ADVANTAGES:**

- 1) Help **block out** irrelevant distractions and focus on **task relevant** information
- 2) Provide a sense of **familiarity** - just another kick
- 3) Maximize the likelihood of a **consistent** performance

☞ Bull et al. (1996)

Pre-kick

☞ *"When everything is going crazy around you and the nerves are attacking your confidence, it's important to keep everything exactly the same,"*

☞ *(from www.bbc.co.uk)*



33/41 successful kicks

- 👉 Place the ball on the kicking tee. Take four steps back, five to the side.
- 👉 Create a right angle between the ball, your body and the posts.
- 👉 Take one more step towards, look at the posts and pick an exact spot at which to aim, drawing an imaginary line from that point down to the ball.
- 👉 Then a deep breath, one more check of the line, a purposeful stride forward, a plant of the right foot, let the left swing through the ball and - bang.

Developing routines

☞ May include:

- ◆ Imagery
- ◆ Focusing cues (words/ actions)
- ◆ Positive affirmations (Let's do it)
- ◆ Relaxation – deep breath

☞ In pairs – choose a skill and consider what sort of routine could be appropriate

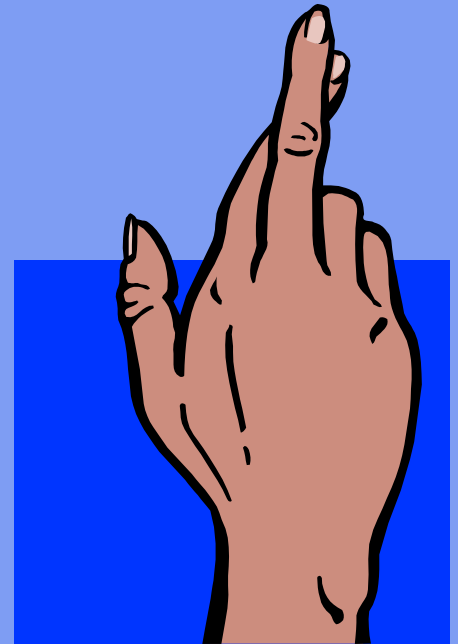
Pre-match routines

- 👉 Do whatever it takes to be ready for the match
- 👉 REALLY ready!
- 👉 EG – no alcohol/ night before meal/ making time for imagery/ early to bed etc

Avoid superstitious rituals

☞ Superstitions are based on assumption that factors out with one's control influence behaviour

☞ Focus on factors that can control!



Strategy 4 - GOAL SETTING

- ☞ Setting goals focuses the mind and increases the likelihood of **QUALITY** performance

- ☞ Goals should focus on factors can control (performance/ technique/ effort – NOT the result)

- ☞ Goals for:
 - **Season**
 - **Match**
 - **Training**

Training goals

☞ *'It's not about practice makes perfect... it is perfect practice that makes perfect'*

- ☞ *Train like you are going to compete!*
- ☞ *Set training goals – why are you here and what are you going to do?*

Summary

- 👉 Provide introduction to theory behind optimal focusing for sport
- 👉 Practical strategies to help focus on what is important and deal with distractions

Game Over!

