

## Introduction

- Context: Mental skills affecting Decision Making.
- An elite focus. That is, until fundamental motor skills are in place, mental skills may not warrant the same attention (but later they certainly do, if performance excellence is the outcome sought).
- Practical mental skills tips. For training, and game day (including preparation and post-game).

## Optimised Decision Making in Basketball (Players)

Working **Definition** (for this presentation only) – clarity of mind to facilitate best option (task / skill execution) choice, while under competitive pressure

**Context** – physical, technical, tactical, technology, mental, advanced levels

### Key Messages.

1. Under pressure, Decision Making deteriorates.
2. Ways to overcome such performance decrements – (a) develop adaptive habits, at training, and in games, “just another game” mentality; (b) a focus on personal best always, and the pursuit of excellence.
3. Learn / Teach: (a) Life experience (sampling different sports and leisure activities, and related motor skills); (b) coaching / deliberate play; (c) mental skills acquisition and optimisation (this presentation’s focus).

**Mental Skills** – arousal, anxiety, motivation, confidence, attention. Together, each will influence decision making ability under pressure. So, to improve DM, improve mental skills.

## Arousal

Wakefulness, alertness, consequences for DM (thought, perception) and motor skills execution. Negative appraisal of arousal may lead → anxiety.

Difference between introverts and extroverts. Variations throughout games, also fluctuations in accordance with time of day, and events of the day / game.

**Hint:** Learn to **Monitor**, gain **Awareness** (of optimal arousal zone for self), then **Regulate** for best performance. Astute coach to assist juniors with this.

## Anxiety

With arousal. Cognitive (thoughts, beliefs) and Somatic (physical i.e. nervousness, sweating, heart rate up). Major issue in all sports, for most athletes and coaches, and in life. Many performance consequences. Choking.

**Hint:** Normalise anxiety with all athletes, treat with acceptance, mindfulness techniques. “Congratulations, you are human, sounds like you are ready to play, that’s cool”, etc.

## **Motivation**

**Intrinsic** (task / process focused, personal mastery, pursuit of excellence) – internal to self.

**Extrinsic** (ego, outcome focused, in comparison with others, win/lose considerations) – external (fame, fortune, popularity, power, etc). Kicks in more with age, and coach, parents, peer influence. Can lead to maladaptive behaviours, when individual’s perceived competence is lower.

**Self determination theory:** (Deci & Ryan) autonomy, competence, and relatedness to others (social factors). The theory says that everyone strives for independent choice (eg. choose the sport they want to play), they want to be recognised as competent in the things they do, and they seek positive and reinforcing relationships with significant others (eg. peer group). Primary needs for each individual. Consider as a coach, in everything you do.

**Hint:** Encourage focus on task execution and success, not win / lose. Establish an environment so every athlete can succeed (even if the team is losing!).

## **Attention**

1. Concentration. Focused. Central vision largely, eg. free throw shooting, three point shot.
2. Selective attention. Ignoring distractions (eg. crowd noise, poor refereeing decisions, sledging, anxiety, other) while focusing on the task at hand.
3. Divided attention. Mental time-sharing. Like point guard mapping where team-mates and defenders are while getting through a full court press, or first entry pass in the offence.

All vital aspects under pressure, and for good decision making. The right attention (focusing on the right thing) at the right time.

**Hint:** Demand good concentration from all athletes, starting at training, and in every game. Eg. One person talking at a time, “eyes in guys”. Look and see, listen and hear, hear and understand, understand and execute, etc. “We need to learn to concentrate guys, practice starts now”.

## **Enhancing each mental skill**

Arousal – routines, accommodating individual differences, intervention

Anxiety – acceptance, normalise, process solution (attention, support, routines), relaxation, meditation, imagery

Motivation – environmental, parent / coaches, personality, philosophical

Attention – factored into every practice session and drill, demand it

Confidence – provide the means for each athlete to succeed, be process focused, encourage positive self-talk (and team-talk) only

### Teaching Decision Making

Understand. Game play. Letting Go. Non Punitive. Assessment. Reflect.

Enhance each of the related mental skills.

Consider imagery – another topic.

### Decision Making Context Diagram

