

Are You Ready to Fence?

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Sunday, 17 June 2007

The objective of mental preparation is developing a mindset that creates consistent performance your talents. Athletes such as Lance Armstrong, Pedro Martinez, and Michelle Kwan have consistently outstanding feats and it is out of the ordinary for them to have sub par performance. Developing the proper mindset that prepares you for tournament after tournament can lead to peak performance.

But, how do you get your mind ready? That first step starts with feeling that you are ready to compete.

Typically, training for a particular tournament involves sharpening of your fencing abilities. Perhaps you are working on a particular move that you haven't perfected yet. We're always working on ways to get better. Many fencers dwell on what they haven't gotten right so far. The challenging part of this step is: knowing that you already have what it takes to succeed despite tournament results to show it.

Try these steps to build a ready mindset:

- Feel confident in your abilities.

Why would an opponent be afraid of you if you don't already feel that you are a strong fencer? Rather than questioning your abilities, tell yourself that you have worked hard, and now you are ready to show your opponents what damage you can do!

- Hope is not a strategy.

I have heard from many of my clients, "I hope I can do it." Hope isn't a bad thing; it has its place in everyone's lives. It doesn't have a place in a fencing bout that you want to win. Imagine if you were having a major surgery and as you were being wheeled into the operating room the surgeon says, "I hope I can do this." You would lose a lot of confidence the doctor and worry about the outcome. You would rather hear, "Everything is going to ok," and you could completely trust the doctor.

- Reframe your thoughts by choosing to think in a positive, but realistic, manner.

Are you really thinking in a way that will give you the best chance of success? If you are a U and you enter an A rated tournament, all the positive thinking in the world probably won't get you a gold medal. But you can walk away from the tournament knowing that you are becoming a better fencer for competing in the first place. See the difference?

- Stop "working on things" and start fencing!

Competition isn't the time to use tactics and skills that have a high rate of failure. If you have finally nailed a new move, then it's ok to use it in competition. Stick with what works, and leave your new unproven tricks in practice. You'll end up more frustrated in the long run.

Becoming skilled at this important first step in mental readiness is an ongoing process that requires deliberate effort. Just like training your bladework or footwork, a last minute effort won't do you much good. These tips can be difficult at first, but keep following them and they will become second nature, and you will look forward to the challenge of competition!

In the next article, we'll focus on learning to trust in your abilities.

Do you have a question for the “Head” Coach? Email them to airathanas@fencing.net. All responses remain anonymous.