

REVIEWING YOUR MENTAL GAME

When you review your performances don't forget your mental game advises Simon Hartley

Do you review your performances?

Do you reflect on your game after training sessions and competitions? If so, does your review extend beyond "that was okay", or "that was pretty good", or even "that was ****!". Do you dig underneath the skin of the performance and look at how you performed? Often our greatest learning takes place when we review our performances. Therefore, ensuring that we review our performance effectively is an important part of any player's development.

"Do you dig underneath the skin of the performance..?"

Some players will go that little bit deeper. They will look in detail at their technical performance, the execution of their skills and identify the areas which need attention. Many players will do the same with their tactical game and start to understand areas where they may have been exposed. Equally, lots of players will reflect on their physical game and become aware of areas that they need to work on, such as their speed, stamina, flexibility or agility. You probably reflect on those elements as well. But do you also review your mental game?

YOUR MENTAL PERFORMANCE

Take a moment now to stop and reflect. Grab a cup of tea and maybe even a pen and a piece of paper. Have a think about your mental performance. Are there things that frustrate you in your mental game? Are there things that you'd really like to get right? Is your mental

game better than it was a year ago? How about a month ago or last week? Is your mental game constantly improving? Do you keep tabs on it in the same way you do with your technical game, your tactical game and physical game?

Here are some pointers to help you along:

- Can you focus on the most critical elements of your game in key moments or do you find yourself getting distracted (even by your own thoughts)?
- Do you tend to play with a quiet mind or are you aware of the thoughts that are flying around?
- Do you often find yourself completely absorbed and lost in the game or do you find it tough to really immerse yourself?
- Do you often feel pressure?
- Are your thoughts and feelings normally positive or negative?
- Can you engineer your optimal mindset consistently or does it tend to be a bit hit and miss?
- Can you turn around your performance quickly in the middle of a game if you are having a bad game?
- Are you in control of your confidence or is your confidence dictated by outside forces (such as results, other people or circumstances)?
- Do you tend to operate in your comfort zone or are you happy to work in your discomfort zone?
- How do you respond to really tough situations and challenges, such as injury, poor form etc?

You'll have other questions of your own, I'm sure. That's not a definitive list by any means, more a starter for 10. By asking these questions and being honest with the answers, we start to identify the areas that we need to address.

Often it is wise to get some objective viewpoints too. These could come from other people or even from video.

PLAN - DO - REVIEW

In my sport psychology coaching I use a very simple formula; it's known as the 'plan - do - review'. To be honest, it's a bit of a misnomer. Its name suggests that the first stage of the cycle is to plan. In reality, the first stage is always the review, because the review informs the plan.

REVIEW

If we plan without a review, we do so blind-folded. How do we know what to work on? How do we know the essential things that we need to get right? How do we identify the things that are going to have a significant positive impact on our performance? All those questions are answered through our review.

In my opinion, the review is the most important element of the cycle. Sometimes awareness alone helps us to make positive changes to our game. Just being aware of what our mind and emotions are doing helps us to take control of them.

"Can you turn around your performance quickly..?"

When working in a Premiership rugby union club a few years ago, we regularly filmed the players. Rather than filming the match, we would train the camera on specific individuals and track them for the entire game. On one occasion we followed a back-row forward. What we saw surprised us. Whenever this player went to ground in a tackle or a ruck, he would always be the last to get up. He then jogged over to the action and was the last to join it. Consequently, he was not particularly effective. The coaches decided to say nothing to the player, but

TOP TIPS:

1. Take some time to review your mental game.
2. Ask the tough questions.
3. Answer them honestly.
4. Get some objective feedback.
5. Follow the simple 'plan - do - review' cycle.

simply sat him down to watch the footage. When we filmed him a month later, he was a far more effective player. It's amazing what we learn sometimes by watching ourselves.

FINDING RESOURCES

Reviewing also helps us to start finding the resources that we need to improve our game. If we're struggling to hone our focus or to master our motivation, we might decide to type 'hone focus in sport' or 'master motivation in sport' into Google, or to check out some of the previous articles on these subjects in Squash Player! But that's not the only reason that the review is the key element in the plan - do - review. It also keeps the

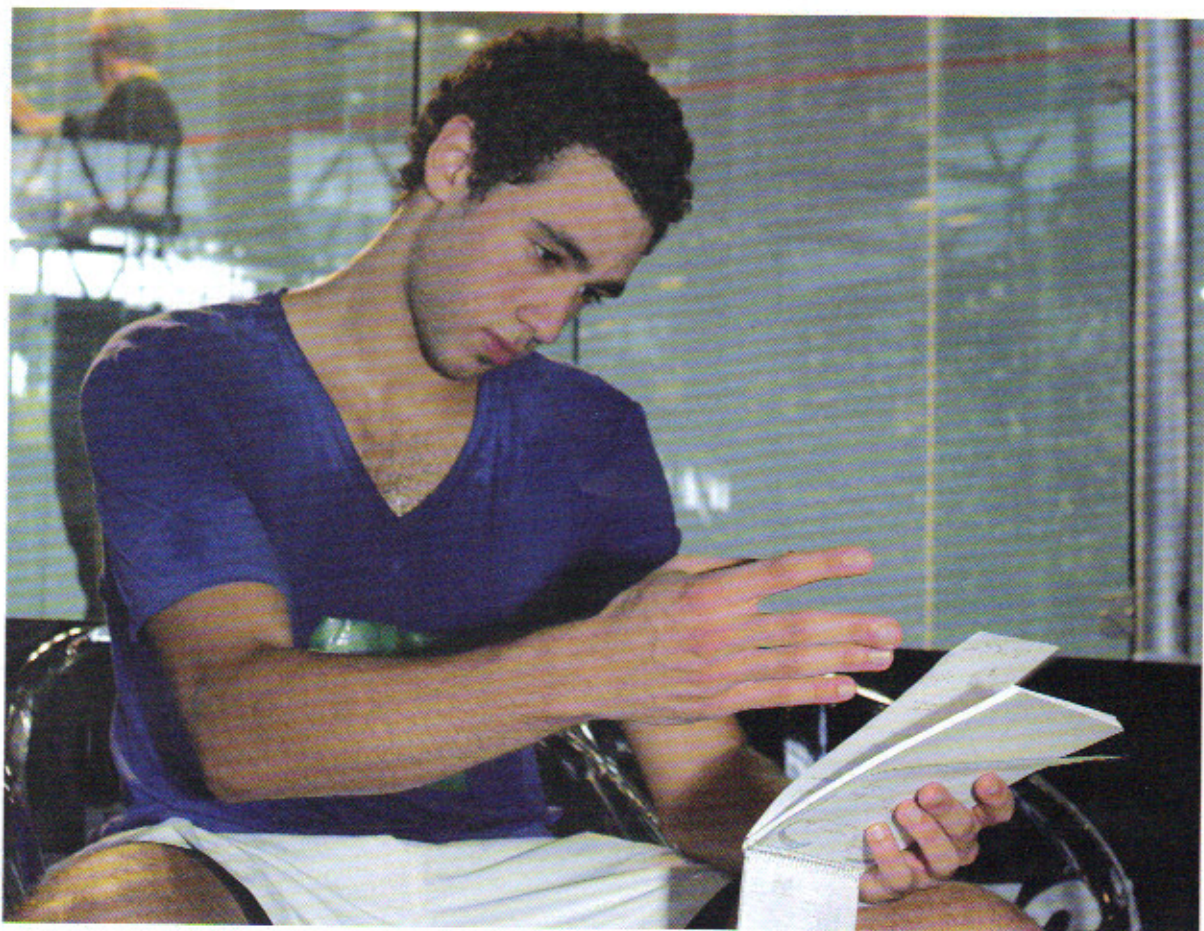


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cycle together. If we only completed the 'plan' and the 'do', the cycle would end. By reviewing, we start the next cycle by informing the next planning stage. This simple formula helps us to continually learn and constantly improve.



Harry Ashour reviews his performance

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