

It's ALL Mental by Doug Swanson (August 2015)

"... life is never neat, it is made up of doors and trapdoors. You move down baroque corridors, and even when you think you know which door to open, you still need to have the courage to choose." J. M. Ledgard, *Submergence*

"...when people ask what is the biggest transition to the NBA from college, it is definitely defense and the mental part." Magic Johnson

I have often been asked, what percentage of the game is mental? My reply is **it is ALL mental**.

Physical preparation is mental – deciding to outwork others takes courage, stamina and high tolerance of pain – that's mental.

Preparing to play is assuredly mental. Seeing (visualizing) one's play; using good verbal, physical and visual cues in mental; reactivation is mental; reframing is mental.

Remaining engaged throughout the game, playing moment to moment, not letting the past events or future events derail the activities of the present is all mental.

Conducting a serious post-game evaluation is also mental. Being a player is fully mental. You are the player you are because you have trained your neurons to do what they do. Muscles don't move; you train your brain to move your muscles.

It cannot be anything BUT mental! In the movie, *The Peaceful Warrior*, Socrates (Nick Nolte) asks Dan Millman three questions. Where are you? What time is it? What are you? I will use their discussion to support why I believe it is all mental. The answers (below) are simple and they are correct regardless of where you are or what you are doing. **Where are you? HERE!; What time is it? NOW!; What are you? THIS MOMENT!** Knowing the answers makes all this sound easy. It is anything but easy. The most difficult task we face as human beings is being present, being engaged and attentive to the demands of the situation, being where we are supposed to be.

I find it interesting to note that *we are almost always where we are not*. We are often imagining of a future or we are dwelling on some past event, which pulls us away from engaging in the present.

Being present means you are HERE, you are engaged in only that which is present (NOW) and you are deeply engaged in being fully present in the moment. Nothing more, nothing less. Best performers, best friends, best athletes, best artists are at their best when they are: HERE, NOW, THIS MOMENT.

Research has found in the athletes who attain the **Ideal Performance State** the following defining characteristics: energized, excited, enthused, aroused and yet relaxed and calm, engaged, optimistic, present, unruffled by the changing of events, centred, "feeling" in control, "feeling" flow, being in the zone. The ideal performance state reflects an athlete being focused, retaining effective / achieving imagery, maintaining effective self-talk, having the ability under deep pressure to reframe the inevitable errors and mistakes that are made and the ability to remain calm and relaxed while simultaneously activating energy and enthusiasm.

It's all mental, as we can train all elements of the ideal performance state. Training is certainly designed to develop skills and to develop physical prowess for the sport. Just as importantly training should also be designed to create the skills in the athlete that are evidenced in the ideal performance state. Skill without focus, without clarity of image and purpose, without positive self-talk and without the ability to remain calm and energized cannot attain the ideal performance state. When elite performer meets elite performer the mentally skilled performer will win. It's all mental.