

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Athletes



Bob Swoap, Ph.D.
Professor and Chairman
Department of Psychology
Warren Wilson College
Asheville, North Carolina

Seven Habits



1. Effective Goal-Setting

- Challenging but realistic
- Specific and with a time-frame
- Short-term and long-term
- Written down
- Action-oriented; focused on the process more than on the end-result (e.g., place kicker)



2. Working Hard

– Outwork your competitors

- Brian Sell
- Roger Clemens
- Annika Sorenstam
- LaDainian Tomlinson

– “Just do it!”

- Behavior vs. Intentions



3. Training Smart

– Work on weaknesses

- Sebastian Coe (confidence)
- 1980 U.S. Olympic Hockey Team (fitness, unity)



– Have a routine (mental and physical) for CONSISTENCY



4. Using Others as Support

- Get feedback from coaches, teammates, and others
 - Ask for (and accept) critique
 - Get support and instruction
- Accountability to one's stated intentions (e.g., posting goals)



5. Concentration and Focus

•Sean O'Neill's *Rules*

- Rule #1 – Try For EVERY Ball.
- Rule #2 – If The Ball Is Too Far Away To Reach, See Rule #1
- Rule #3 – Stay In Present Moment In Competition (Focus On Technique or Point-by-Point Strategy)



Concentration and Focus

- Focus on the present
 - Past and future largely irrelevant
- “What if I can’t” needs to be replaced with “What do I need to do right now?”
(e.g., Anne Riddle Lundblad)
- Practice refocusing during drills (e.g., Todd)



6. Mental Rehearsal

- Imagery/visualization
 - Planning for a competition (e.g., race plan)
 - Using mental rehearsal pre-race to get yourself in an optimal mental state
 - Imagining potential barriers and how one will overcome them (e.g., Coach Jackson, next slide)



Mental Rehearsal: Imagining potential barriers

“Visualization is an important tool for me. During one of those [imagery] sessions, I visualized a way to neutralize Magic Johnson: double-teaming him in the backcourt to force him to give up the ball.”

“That was one of the keys to beating the Lakers to win our first championship in 1991.”

-- Coach Phil Jackson,
Sacred Hoops (1995)



7. Overcoming Self-Doubt and Setbacks

- Confidence
 - Preparation/routine
 - Knowing you've trained hard
 - Commit to not allowing negative or irrelevant thoughts to dominate (e.g., can I hang with this group?)
- Cognitive control
 - Being able to manage self-talk
 - Controlling automatic thoughts (e.g., "I can't do this.") by using cue words / phrases to get focus back on the ACTION vs. the outcome (e.g., "next 200 meters")



Dealing with setbacks

- “Failure isn’t fatal. All the setbacks I’ve had, although heartbreaking at the time, were only temporary.”
 - Don Shula
- Contingency planning
 - Preparing for scenarios
 - How will I handle a slip?
- Avoiding mental traps
 - Black-white thinking
 - “If I don’t complete my full work-out, it will be a waste.”
 - Catastrophizing
 - “This is the worst I’ve ever run...”

