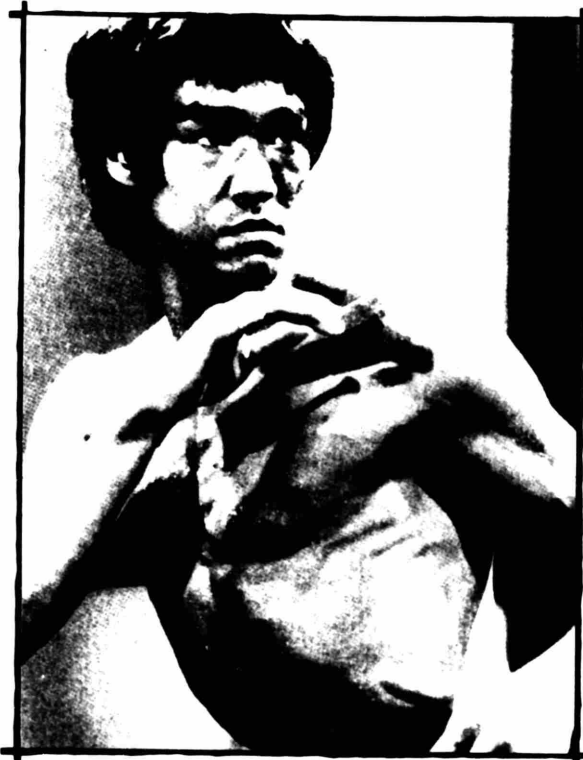


Improve your Golf, Tennis, Running, TaeKwon-Do, Football, or any sport through mental training .

Visualisation, relaxation, concentration, letting go and trusting your inner Self is the new language of success.



Bruce Lee... The popular face of Martial Arts

# Mind over Sport

**N**ever before has so much time, attention and energy been devoted to understanding the links between brain, mind, and sporting performance. The scientists, psychologists and physiologists are all heading down to the track and onto the football pitches armed with new and exciting approaches to training, health and fitness. Look at any health section in your local bookshop and you will see many titles that deal with this new approach. Books on the inner game of tennis, golf, the holistic approach to training, the warrior athlete etc. abound.

## The Inner Game

All sports and games have two aspects - the inner and the outer. The outer game is composed of various moves and responses - the rules we decide to play by. The inner game is also something we are all familiar with. It is the contest with ourselves. It involves our fears, hopes, worries, expectations. It's a battle between our fear of failure and our desire to improve and excel. For many this inner game is a ceaseless chatter and clamour of thoughts and self-criticism. The resulting tension knocks us out of our flow, causes poor judgement and frustration. Mastering the inner game is all about being able to focus our attention on the game and not on our thoughts - getting out of our heads and into the game.

## The One Move

The single most important aspect of the mental training is developing the ability to pay single undivided attention to what is taking place. When Borg the

famous tennis player was asked what his secret was, he summarised it as just playing each shot/ball totally. If he was winning he let go of the thought of winning and put all his energy

*"Golf is twenty per cent technique and eighty per cent mental"*  
**Ben Hogan, Golf Professional.**

into playing the ball that was coming over the net. Similarly, if he was losing he let go of that as well and simply played the ball. Thoughts of winning or losing cause you to react whether easing up or trying too hard. Either way your energy is divided between playing the ball and thinking the thought.

Jack Nicklaus the famous golfer had a slightly different approach. Before hitting the ball he pictured in his mind what he wanted to happen. He imagined the type of swing, strength of contact with the ball, trajectory, landing and roll-on exactly in absolute detail. This course having been set in his

mind (conscious and subconscious) he simply let go and followed through without the "trying to". Most of our trying or effort is a reaction to a thought of failure. Jack Nicklaus's visualisation relaxed the worry or fear so his full energy could focus on the play.

Keeping your eye on the ball really means keeping your mind on the ball.

## Mind Training

We are in essence all natural athletes with abilities and potential beyond our self-limiting ideas of ourselves. As young children free from worry and ideas we learnt and developed at an astonishing rate, movement, balance, co-ordination. We also had more fun.

To regain or awaken to that potential again we can make use of the other mind techniques used in sports. There are primarily - relaxation - attention/concentration - movement awareness - visualisation.

## 1. Relaxation

For the professional or amateur a relaxation session of between 15-30mins per day would be ideal. This can be done anytime. It can be so wished be included in the training session. As the muscles of the body relax the mind responds becoming still and clear. Relaxation is letting go of the mental chatter. It is a vital foundation for developing the

ability to pay attention or concentrate. In most cases relaxation training from an expert in this field would be a decided advantage.

## 2. Concentration

In sport we all know how trying too hard to make a good shot/putt more often backfires and we get worse. Developing the ability to relax the effort and direct your attention fully requires practice.

The relaxation helps combined with a little practice of concentration every day. Again for a more detailed explanation refer to lead article on page 1.

## 3. Awareness

With relaxation and focused attention comes awareness. In training sessions we are often attempting to improve a particular aspect of our game. Next time just observe yourself going through the motions. Observe the movement, the feel, the result. As you become totally involved learning takes place, the game improves of itself. Or you might want to try this experiment: Purposely try and make your fault worse. Paradoxically it often happens that instead you improve.

## 4. Visualisation

People generally live up to their self-expectation or image no matter what it is. To improve ability and performance we need to create a new image of ourselves and our abilities. This can be done through visualisation. Visualisation is most effective when you are in a deep state of relaxation: when you are just about to fall asleep picture yourself in vivid colour really playing that game with such tremendous skill and enjoyment. Feel it with all your emotion. Sense it. Get into it. Run the visualisation film again in the morning just before you really awaken and once more during the day. A few minutes each time will do but remember the quality or intensity of the visualisation is what matters. Playing this visualisation film will powerfully affect your subconscious mind causing it to deliver the goods just as you prescribed.

I remember in a yoga class talking to a woman who had been going to swimming classes for a few years but she still was not able to swim. Basically she was scared of the water. I advised her to practise visualising herself in the water, calm and relaxed, allowing the water to float the body and seeing herself swimming effortlessly. Three weeks later she reported that on her first night back in the pool she actually managed to swim. Needless to say she was thrilled and couldn't believe how easy it actually was compared to her thoughts - which had made it impossible.

Curiously all the latest breakthroughs and discoveries from the high tech research projects on the mind in sport are giving scientific proof and validation for such age-old systems as yoga, meditation, t'ai-chi, aikido, zen archery, etc.

Yoga and other such systems were specifically designed to develop a still mind, effortless concentration, relaxation, increased energy and awareness. These aspects and abilities are now seen as even more important by coaches in producing champions than the training rituals of the past. Indeed many ordinary sportspeople, be they golfers, footballers, cyclists or tennis players now regularly practice yoga deep breathing techniques, meditation and relaxation to bring mind and body into harmony. As with any holistic approach they also find that mastering their inner game spills over into a more harmonious and successful approach to the game of life itself.

-Brendan Clifford.



*Film Star and Bodybuilder, Arnold Schwarzenegger has always used mind training techniques to attain his goals. He is a firm believer in 'Mind over Matter'. "As long as the mind can envision the fact that you can do something, you can"*



*Nigel Mansell describes his greatest moments of sporting excellence as almost a type of altered state where you are so into what's taking place it's as if everything happens in slow motion with perfect timing and control an effortless state of pure concentration*