



FIGHT ON! MENTALITY

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I get nervous before every game.

How do I calm my nerves so I can perform at a high level?

Pre-game anxiety is a horrible feeling. Just when you need to stay *calm* and *focused*, those stomach pains, sweats, fast heartbeat, and jitters can really make you feel worn out instead of pumped and ready to play. I'm sure you've heard this a thousand times, but remember that *all* athletes get at least a little pre-game anxiety. Even the greatest vets in the game get nervous.

1. Get some inspo, that's INSPIRATION.

For some athletes it's a song, a famous quote, or watching a YouTube video of their favorite pro-athlete. It's different for everyone, but keep some inspiration with you to look at/listen to before your game. You can play your favorite song or listen to a podcast that gets you motivated. Not only does pre-game inspo distract you from anxiety, it also keeps you present and in the moment. And speaking of being in the moment.

2. Focus on the NOW, not the past, not the future.

Mindfulness is a practice that many top-performing athletes do to prepare for games. It's about keeping your thoughts right here, right now. When you're anxious before a game, you're thoughts are in the future, thinking about every last thing that can possibly go wrong.

What if I miss the shot? What if I let my team down? What will my coach say? What if I'm not good enough to play? What if we lose? What if it's my fault?

You get the idea. This list can go on and on, just like your anxious thoughts can literally turn into a giant snowball in your mind if you don't put a stop to it. But what these thoughts all have in common is that they are thoughts about the future. All of the what if's that your mind can think of.

If you practice mindfulness before your game, you bring your thoughts to the present moment. This will help you focus on your game right now because when you're out there playing, right now is all you have control of.

Start by taking some slow, deep breaths, inhaling through your nose, as if you were getting the strength you need to breathe from your abdominal area. Then, slowly, breathe out through your mouth. Do this ten times and this will automatically take your anxiety a few notches down.

Next, to bring your thoughts to the here and now, focus on 5 things around you. These 5 things can be things you see, smell, feel, or hear. It can be the sound of someone's footsteps, the scent of the soap you're using as you wash your hands, or how the ground feels on your feet as you walk or run.

These 5 things can be anything around you, but the point is to bring your thoughts to the present. You can even reach out and touch the things that you observe (e.g., the cool grass on the ground, the rough pavement on the sidewalk, the cool water you splash on your face). Put all of your energy and focus on these things around you. Now stay calm, relaxed, and do your thing!

Fight ON!

FOCUS ON THE NOW