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Leif H. Smith, PsyD
Todd M. Kays, PhD



*Sports
Psychology*
FOR
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***Sports
Psychology***
FOR
DUMMIES®

**by Leif H. Smith, PsyD, and
Todd M. Kays, PhD**

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to Aiden and Gable Smith, my boys and my greatest teachers, and to Todd Kays, who shared my dream of getting this book in the public's hands.

—Leif H. Smith, PsyD

This book is dedicated to the numerous people who have inspired me in my journey, including my family, Kathy, Jake, Charley, Bill, Mark, Jenny, Jeff, Paul, Don, Tom, and Naomi. And to my coauthor, Leif — it has been a blast, and I look forward to many years of continuing to advance the field together. I would not be here without all of you.

—Todd M. Kays, PhD

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Introduction

Sports psychology is a relatively new field, but it's one of the fastest-growing areas in sports performance. Professional sports are big money, and teams want a return on their investment in their players. So it should come as no surprise that every NFL, NBA, MLB, and NHL team employs someone trained in sports psychology to assist them with helping players work through mental blocks, slumps, and general decreases in performance.

We wrote this book because we want to get the information that we teach to elite athletes and teams to the general public. The services we provide as sports psychologists can be expensive, and most athletes who are just looking for a way to get the edge in their sports participation can't afford to fork over hundreds of dollars to meet with their own sports psychologist. With this book, you don't have to — you hold in your hands the same information we share with our clients, for a tiny fraction of the cost.

This book is packed full of information that can help you get more out of your physical talent. We've filled this book with techniques and skills that we teach to professional and Olympic athletes — skills that you can apply in your own training today.

About This Book

Most sports psychology books provide good stories and education on sports psychology concepts, but they don't take the next step and cover actual techniques and strategies that athletes can use. In this book, we do exactly that.

Plus, this book is organized for busy athletes who are on the go and don't have a lot of time to waste. The information is easy to access and written in plain English, without any psychobabble to bog you down. You don't need a PhD to understand this book. All you need is a thirst for knowledge and a willingness to work hard to reach your goals — we bring the rest.

Conventions Used in This Book

We don't use many special conventions in this book, but there are a few you should be aware of:

- ✔ When we want to share a story from our practice as sports psychologists, we refer to ourselves by our first names, so you can tell which of us is telling you the story. For example, we may say, "Leif was working with a pro soccer team . . ." or "Todd's client was a young tennis phenom. . . ." When you see the names Leif and Todd, just remember that's us.
- ✔ Whenever we define a new term, we put it in *italics*, and define it shortly thereafter, often in parentheses.
- ✔ When we give you a list of steps to take, we put the action part of the step in **bold** so that you can easily find out what you're supposed to do.
- ✔ When we give you a Web address, we put it in `monofont`. When this book was printed, some Web addresses may have needed to break across two lines of text. If that happened, rest assured that we haven't put in any extra characters (such as hyphens) to indicate the break. So, when using one of these Web addresses, just type in exactly what you see in this book, pretending as though the line break doesn't exist.

What You're Not to Read

To understand the subject at hand, you don't have to read any text preceded by a Technical Stuff icon (see "Icons Used in This Book," later in this Introduction, for more information). Also, sidebars (text in gray boxes) are asides and not critical to the text. Of course, if you *want* to read these things, we think you'll find them completely fascinating! But if you're short on time or you just want the information you absolutely need, you can pass them by.

Foolish Assumptions

In writing this book, we made some assumptions about you. One or more of the following should apply to you:

- ✔ You're an athlete with particular goals that you'd like to achieve, and you think that the mental aspect of your training and performance can benefit from further understanding and practice. You're willing to work hard to achieve your goals.

- ✔ You're a coach and you want to use sports psychology to help your athletes achieve their goals. You recognize that training isn't just physical.
- ✔ You're a parent of an athlete, and you want to support your kid's athletic career in all the right ways.

How This Book Is Organized

This book is conveniently divided into six parts. Here's what you find in each.

Part I: Getting the Winning Edge: Sports Psychology Fundamentals

In Part I, we introduce you to the important basic principles of sports psychology. We start off by telling you how to build your mental toughness, an essential skill for any competitive athlete. Then we turn to goal setting, because you're more likely to get somewhere you want to be if you know where you're going. Motivation is key to athletes of all levels, and it ebbs and flows throughout your season; we show you how to monitor your motivation and boost it when you need to. Finally, we give you the information you need to increase your confidence, because without confidence in your own skills and abilities, it doesn't matter how talented you are or how hard you've worked.

Part II: Your Mental Toolkit for Success

In Part II, we dig into some key concepts that you need to know in your pursuit of competitive greatness. These concepts include concentration, as well as mental imagery. We explain the basics of focus — what it is, how to do it, when to do it, and when not to do it. We fill you in on mental imagery — one of the tools the pros use to be their best. We tell you how self-talk can help or hurt your performance, and how you can use it to your advantage. Finally, we help you master the task-management principles of the best athletes in the world, which will allow you to do more in less time.

Part III: Staying Competitive: Sports Psychology in Action

In Part III, we fill you in on the power of routines in sports and show you how to create your own effective routines to kick your performance up a notch. We cover the keys to handling pressure in the big moments — how to keep your cool while taking that last-second jumper, how to you relax and drain that putt. We give you simple but effective ways to do both, and to remain poised, no matter the situation. We offer cutting-edge strategies for energy management, a key component to staying competitive. Finally, we share some key ways to bounce back from adversity — whether it's an injury or a slump or a losing season.

Part IV: Improving Team Performance with Sports Psychology

In Part IV, we show you how to improve communication on your team, because teams that communicate better perform better. We explain the importance of leaders in the team dynamic and help you become a better leader, regardless of your role on your team. We end the part by talking about teamwork — how to improve your team's chemistry and, in turn, improve your team's chances for success.

Part V: Sports Psychology for Coaches and Parents

We wrote Part V specifically with coaches and parents in mind. In this part, we offer concrete strategies you can use to improve your team's performance — from helping them focus to guiding them through playing under pressure to motivating them to succeed.

Sports are different today than they were when you were a kid, so we have a chapter specifically for parents of today's athletes. We tell you how you can support your kids without pressuring them, how to help them prepare for competition, and what to do if your kids say they don't want to play sports anymore.

Part VI: The Part of Tens

Part VI is chock full o' tips, in three brief chapters. We tell you how you can apply sports psychology principles and concepts in the business world — from mentally preparing for a grueling work day, to setting goals for advancing in your career, to dealing with difficult co-workers. We offer tips for mastering the art of competing like a world-class athlete. We give you specific strategies for managing stress — from using meditation and mental imagery to formulating an exercise plan. And we end this part with a chapter for parents, with ten tips for making your kids' athletic experience a positive and rewarding one.

Icons Used in This Book

Like all *For Dummies* books, this book's margins are sprinkled with icons to help direct your attention to certain concepts, definitions, and interesting information. Here's a key to what they mean:



This icon directs you to techniques that world-class athletes use to improve their performance.



This book is a reference book, which means you don't have to commit it to memory — you can come back to it when you need it. But when you see this icon, you're sure to find information that we think is so crucial that you need to remember it.



This icon alerts you to stories or examples of some of our work with athletes from all walks of life.



This icon is for people who can't get enough of sports psychology principles. You can skip reading these paragraphs without consequence — but if you really want the inside scoop, read on!



When you see this icon, you can be sure we're alerting you to a danger or pitfall of some sort — something you should avoid.

Where to Go from Here

This book isn't linear — you don't have to read it from beginning to end, like a novel. Each chapter is self-contained, so you can start anywhere you want, and skip around as you like. You can use the table of contents and index to guide you, but here are a few suggestions for places to begin: If you're new to sports psychology — you've only heard about it but you've never practiced any sports psychology techniques — start with Part I for a good foundation. If you want to improve in a specific area, like focus or managing your schedule, turn to the appropriate chapters in Part II. If you want to use sports psychology to win, make Part III your destination. If you're looking for ways to improve your team's performance, Part IV is for you. And if you're a parent or coach who wants to use sports psychology to help the athletes in your life, head to Part V. Finally, if you're short on time, Part VI is full of useful tips you can use today.

We hope you enjoy using this book to help you accomplish your goals. We also hope you share with us your success stories and accomplishments, and what you've found helpful in this book. Feel free to e-mail us directly at DrSmith@personalbestconsulting.com and DrKays@athleticmindinstitute.com.

If you want to work with a sports psychologist

Although this book offers many of the strategies and techniques that we provide to our clients as sports psychologists, no book can take the place of working one on one with a professional. If you find that you'd like to work directly with a sports psychologist to take some of these strategies farther, look for

- ✔ **Someone who has both sports psychology training and clinical psychology training:** Sports psychologists with training in both counseling techniques and sports psychology principles are able to understand both the person and the athlete.
- ✔ **A licensed psychologist:** If you have any questions about whether the person you're considering working with is licensed, you

can contact your state's board of psychology. (Just search the Internet for your state and the term *board of psychology* to get that contact information.)

- ✔ **Someone who has extensive experience working with athletes and coaches, especially at your current level of competition:** Many people use exaggerated language on their Web sites and in their literature to make it seem as though they have more experience than they really do.

A good resource for more information on choosing a sports psychologist and sports psychology in general is the American Psychological Association Division 47 (www.apa47.org).