

Train your brain

Use this neuro-linguistic programming advice from expert Donald MacNaughton to train your brain for sporting success

Every situation is recoverable

Programming your brain into believing that every bad scenario can be overturned is the difference between fighting on and throwing in the towel. If a football team that is three-nil down believes it can nick one goal back, then another, it's right back in the game. Focusing on the little steps you can take, rather than worrying about the big picture, is what separates the winners from everyone else.

Always have a plan B

You may have the best squash serve in the world, but if you face an opponent who can counter it you'll be in trouble. Thinking about alternative strategies in advance, just in case your primary plans don't work, is fundamental to success. You should also have coping strategies in place in case you don't start the match or race how you want to.

Don't give anything away

Take three of the greatest athletes ever: Tiger Woods, Roger Federer and Michael Jordan – they never show any hint as to what is going on beneath the surface, even if they are feeling the heat. Nothing shows your opponent that they're getting to you more than shouting and swearing, whereas keeping a cool and positive demeanour, especially when you are underperforming, can put them off their game.

Have a routine

Winning is often about momentum, so it's important to treat each point, round or sequence of play as unrelated to what has gone before. This will stop you dwelling on a bad run and keep you grounded during a good one. Having a routine – bouncing the ball before serving, wiping your face on a towel – will return you to your default start position and prepare both body and mind for action.

Get an advantage before you start

With one boxer I worked on how best to use the walk to the ring, because this was when his doubts surfaced. I told him to imagine that he was becoming taller, bigger and stronger with every step he took. These incremental changes, in his mind, added up until he climbed into the ring feeling like a giant. He changed this walk, which he had to do every fight, from a time of doubt into one of supreme confidence.

'Believing that every bad scenario can be overturned is the difference between fighting on and throwing in the towel'



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