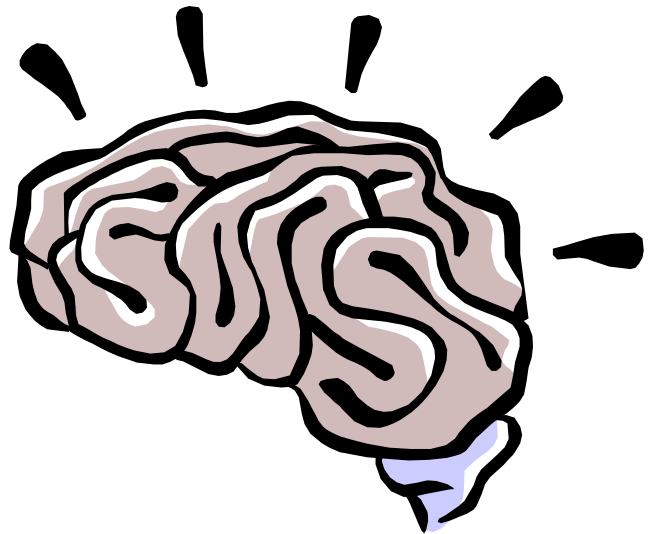


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**M i n d**

**M a t t e r**

***Injecting Mental  
Toughness into  
Your Volleyball  
Game!***



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**M**ind over matter. That's the title of this special mini book, and in sports, there is no better way to pave the road to success. You've heard the cliché, "A game is 10% physical, and 90% mental," and it is true. The player who is best prepared mentally is going to have the most triumph on the playing field.

Some sports require a greater physical toll be paid, but all require a commitment to mental strength in order to succeed. In this special mini book, I am going to provide you with ways you can improve the mental side of your volleyball game. Here's what we have to offer:

- Stop those nerves from taking over your game – before it even starts.
- Prepare before a match, so your mind is strong and totally focused on the task at hand.
- Not letting the little things bother you.
- Keeping your entire team in the game – even when you are down a couple of games.
- How to keep the other team's top players out of your head.
- The important reason why mental toughness keeps you at the top of your game.

At the end of this mini book, you will have the tools you need to hone your mental game and give you the edge you need to rise to the top in volleyball.

*Your opponent, in the end, is never really the player on the other side of the net, or the swimmer in the next lane, or the team on the other side of the field or even the bar you must high jump. Your opponent is yourself, your negative internal voices, your level of determination.*

*-Grace Lichtenstein – Writer and Editor*

## ***Before the game***

The crowd has already started pouring into the stands. Your friends, family and maybe a professional scout or two are taking their seats ready to watch you. You can feel your stomach churn and your heart is racing – nerves can get you at the best of times, but they often come at the worst.

### **Beating the nerves**

The first thing that you need to understand is that nerves are a natural part of anything that is unknown. Your adrenaline will get going and you start to get blurry vision and your body seizes up, because of the intensity of the adrenal rush. Controlling this, and using it to your advantage is going to separate you from the rest of the pack.

The best thing you can do is to find something that helps relax you.

- Music
- Reading
- Light exercise
- A walk
- A nap

Each of these is going to work in a different way for each person – some might work for you, and some may not. You may also have a specific way that you relax, and that is fine as well. The key before a match is to harness the rush and nerves that you have and channel them towards playing the game.

When you relax, a number of things happen:

- Your body doesn't expend energy on tensing your muscles, reserving it for the match.
- You can focus your mind on visualizing (we'll get to that in a bit) what you have to do – whether that is the position you

will cover on certain attacks, going through your approach, or focusing on getting the pass to the setter.

- Your heart rate will slow and so will the rest of the world around you. Often times athletes get ‘blurry’ vision and the game seems to zip by them when their adrenaline is out of control. By relaxing, you get control of that emotion and everything slows down to regular speed. If you really get control of it, you can slow the game down even more. That’s when you are most effective.

### **Nerves aren’t all bad**

With everything I have said, you don’t want to walk into a match too blasé. Nerves and the adrenaline rush are important to heightening your senses and improving your reaction. You may have noticed that I have been talking about ‘harnessing’ the nerves and the adrenaline – not eliminating it.

Just remember that getting excited about a match is fine. It is to be expected. But putting yourself in the right mindset before a match is crucial to rising above everyone else. If you can do that, you will take control of your body and your ultimate volleyball destiny.

### **Visualization**

Part of learning to relax and focus on the match is visualization. You’ve probably already heard it from coaches and other trainers in the past. If you can see yourself doing things correctly, you will be able to execute them properly in the course of a game.

To best illustrate what I mean, think of golf. Many of you have played it, some may have not, but most have seen it (You can also relate this to many other sports).

If you have 150-yards to get to the green and there is a water hazard out front, there is a good chance that you are thinking to yourself, “Don’t go in the water... don’t go in the water.” You think this because you don’t want to go in the water.

Chances are, you are going to go into the water!

Why? Because you are visualizing your ball going into the water and then trying to make a swing that is going to avoid that. If you think about it, it happens more often than not. What separates the best from the rest is thinking about making the perfect shot, rather than the bad one.

If you bring the same idea into volleyball you might be up to serve and thinking to yourself, “don’t hit the net... don’t hit the net,” and then you toss the ball up to serve, and sure enough... it hits the net.

Instead of doing that, try this:

- Bounce the ball a couple of times and focus solely on the perfect form you are going to use for this serve.
- As you line up to serve, zero in on the person you want to serve it to. Picture yourself hitting the ball at that person and having them try and pass it to their setter.
- Instead of thinking, “don’t hit the net,” think, “This is going to be a great serve.” With those simple words, you will completely change your mindset and you will all of a sudden see the ball going over the net, and you will see a better overall result.

You can use this method for anything – if you keep saying to yourself, “if the ball comes to me, don’t miss it,” guess what? You are going to miss the ball. Before your opponent serves, watch yourself in the little TV screen inside your head, making a fantastic pass or a game saving service dig, and you will see a noticeable difference in your success.

Use visualization whenever you can. Teaching your mind to think about the positives and not dwell on the negatives is a difficult task, but one that will reap rewards for you along the way.

## ***Keeping your head during a game***

We've all had games where things just don't go right. Your power hits are cracking the tape every time, or when you try to scrape the ball off your opponent's hands, it always ends up on your side of the net. These things happen.

A game is a series of single events. It is not one long story that has a predetermined outcome. Likewise, one event does not have any bearing on the next event that happens. It may seem like it does, but it is our mind that convinces us that since we are playing bad, "it's a bad day," or "my serve is just off," or "we just don't have it today."

Trust me, you don't just 'have it' one day, and not have it the next. The only thing you don't have, is your mind on the game, when things go bad.

The key to any sort of success during a five-set match is being able to ride out the negatives, and emphasize the positives. And remember – **each game, each match is a series of single events.** You can control each one of those single events, if you believe that the event before it bears no effect on the next event.

For example, if you miss your opponent's serve and they score a point, that single event is done. **Forget about it.** Refocus, *visualize* yourself making the play on the next one, and move on. You will make the play more often than you will miss it if you adopt this mindset.

Too many players let themselves get into slumps. They haven't prepared themselves mentally to handle the single events that are going to happen to them. Here is the key to handling the single events and letting the game take it's course.

- Accept that not every play is going to be perfect. You will have good plays and bad plays – that's normal. Instead of dwelling on the poor plays, you need to flip-flop and start emphasizing the positive plays that you make.

- You must refocus after each play. Treat it as if you only play the game one frame at a time. Once you get in the habit of doing this, your mind will automatically be trained to shed the poor plays from your mind, so you aren't letting them affect your game.
- Remember that a series of positive single events means a big win on the court. To do this you have to train your mind to emphasize the positive single events that happen during the course of a game and build upon them as you go.

No matter how hard you try personally, a sport like volleyball is a team game. You have to rely on the mental strength of others to help you achieve your goals. That's where your mental game can have an effect on others.

### **Show the way mentally**

Every team has one – a person who, despite the circumstances, always puts on a positive face. They are the ones who rally teams that are down with encouragement and support, rather than angry cries for better play.

Why can't you be that person? You not only make yourself stand out as a leader, but your improved play will show the way. Part of mental toughness is being able to continue to play at the highest level while there is adversity around you.

- Help players up who have dove to the floor unsuccessfully attempting a dig. Let them know their effort was important, and to "keep it up!" Anytime you see effort from someone, but the play was unsuccessful, tell them, "next time Joe," or "they're lucky you didn't hit that down the line, Helen." Always be positive.
- When your team is down, you have to make sure that **you** emphasize the positives – even if you just scored your first point in an 8 -1 set. Build on that and get your team believing that if you got one point, you can get more. Once

you get one point, you have to believe that the opposition is going to give up more. Once you swing the pendulum back in your favor – look out!

### ***Turning the tables***

The strongest teams are those that can shake off a few bad rallies in a row to have a rally of their own, or if their backs are against the wall in a match and they come back to win. Of course they are... but the question is how do they do it?

**Winning is a mentality.** Mental toughness begins with believing that your team is capable of winning a point at any time during the game, regardless of the circumstances. And that you can win several points in a row if you have to. Teaching a team to believe this takes a tremendous mental commitment from each player. Here's why:

- The players have to believe that their coaches have prepared them as best as they could. They have to believe in the system, the training, and the conditioning.
- The players have to believe in each other. They need to understand that the player next to them is going to give their most every time they are on the court, and for every **single event** during the course of a match.
- The players have to believe in themselves. You can't doubt your ability and the coaches can't doubt your ability either. If you want success, everybody contributes, and every player needs to believe that their contribution to the team is as important as everyone else's.

It's tough to 'believe' that much – but it is a necessary part of success. Belief is the foundation for the big cross-court smashes, the picture perfect set, and the killer jump serve. **The reason players make these plays is because they believe they are able to do it.**

I would hate to break mental toughness down into something too simple, but I believe it to be the truth. All this is is a state of mind. It

is a state of mind you need to achieve, and you need to help the rest of your team achieve.

## ***More tips for mental toughness***

### **Top players**

Many of us, at one time or another, have been psyched out by the opposing team's best player. It used to happen to me all the time. Then I changed my mentality. While I still respected that player's skills, I challenged myself to do what I could to put a kink in that 'great' player's plans. If you can **rise to the challenge**, you will deflate their spirits, and raise the spirits of your team.

For example, if you are playing the best power in the state, and everyone on your team is a little afraid, make it your mission to be the first one to stuff them in your match. If you and your teammates back off, you are going to find yourself down 2-0 before you know it.

Rise to the challenge of better players – don't let them take the wind out of your sails.

### **Motivating your team**

We touched on this a little earlier, and the best advice I can give is to stay positive. If you are already a team leader and you start getting down on players, they aren't going to play any better.

- You aren't going to win every game. Just take each **single event** and then move on. Get your team to understand that. When you are down – forget it. It is just one point... then another point... then another point... you get the picture
- Encourage players even when mistakes are made. Nobody's perfect, and they need to know that the team still believes in their ability to execute their job.

- Make sure your bench is talking with you, and into the game as much as you are. There is nothing worse than a bunch of players slouched on the bench waiting for their chance to get into the game. If I saw that on my bench, those players wouldn't see the court.

## **Mental Conditioning**

Many people ask, "Are there any exercises I can do to help my focus?" There are, and many are outside the volleyball world, like yoga, martial arts, meditation, etc, but not everyone is going to be up for those.

My advice to you would be to practice being mentally tough. Just like you practice your skills, practice being mentally ready for each match, each set, and each point. Learn to visualize, learn to relax and slow things down, and learn to make each event a single event and you will soon realize that mental toughness is second nature to you.

### ***Just be mentally tough***

Sounds easy, doesn't it. It's not, trust me. It takes practice just like everything else. I'll be honest, you are probably going to meet a lion's share of people who have very little or no mental toughness to speak of. Some people just aren't blessed with the spirit of never giving up, or the determination of winning and being the best. They just don't have the will to win. That's OK.

After this mini book – you do! And you'll be the one on top!

### ***Taking your mental performance to the next level – Fast!***

If you're ready to really reach your full athletic potential, I highly recommend the work of Dr. Patrick Cohn. Dr. Cohn is the founder of Peak Performance Sports.

Click [HERE](#) to check it out!

<http://winningvolleyballskills.com/peak.htm>

Peak Performance Sports is considered the most comprehensive mental game improvement site on the web.

They have assembled the best team of sports psychology experts in the world to help you reach your peak.

You'll gain access to over 400 of the most advanced sports psychology articles, audio programs and interviews with the world's top pro athletes and coaches - all in one place. These guys will help you finally get the winning edge over your opponents - fast!

### **Free Mental Game Coaching Newsletter**

Yes! they have a Free Mental Game Coaching Newsletter. Just visit the site and click on the box: "Access over 300 sports psychology tips!" and you can sign up to receive it immediately.

Here's the link again <http://winningvolleyballskills.com/peak.htm>

### ***Need further help with your Mental Focus?***

As I mentioned earlier, there many exercises you can do to help your focus, and many are outside the volleyball world.

Here's some help to get you started...

Below you'll find some wonderful resources to help you with your mental conditioning and to improve your focus with **everything** you do. You'll find that if you use these activities to improve your focus, as a wonderful side benefit, this improved focus will flow seamlessly to help you with many other areas of your life.

As a side note, I personally fully endorse the practice of yoga in anyone's life. It has helped me tremendously with my flexibility, posture, clarity of mind, I now need less sleep and it has eliminated a nagging lower back pain I had lived with since an early age gymnastics injury. So there's many other great benefits you'll get as a result.

So, if you've been considering yoga, I say Go for it!

## ***Mind Conditioning Resources***

### **YOGA**

#### **A.M. and P.M. Yoga for Beginners (DVD)**

<http://www.winningvolleyballskills.com/ampmyoga.htm>

This DVD is considered a beginner's workout, which means the poses are not too complicated and are held for very short periods of time.

The beauty of this DVD is it incorporates the meditation and relaxation aspects of yoga. The workouts are short, and therefore much easier to fit in to a busy schedule.

If you have never done Yoga before, this would be the perfect place to start.

*If you're up for something a little more "up-beat" and challenging which still gives you the massive benefits of yoga, try this out...*

#### **Bryan Kest: Power Yoga Series (DVD):**

<http://www.winningvolleyballskills.com/poweryoga.htm>

If you want to get in shape like the stars, Bryan Kest teaches wildly popular yoga classes in Santa Monica, California, so popular that stars like David Duchovny and Elisabeth Shue willingly sweat alongside him.

This is a powerful workout, highly recommend for intermediate / advanced users.

## ***MEDITATION***

Yoga itself incorporates some tremendous meditation and relaxation practices. The A.M. and P.M. Yoga for Beginners DVD will give you a great introduction to help you achieve mind clarity and mental focus.

If you want a little more information on meditation practices here's a great resource for you to check out

<http://www.winningvolleyballskills.com/meditation.htm>

On this website you will find useful, hard-to-find information on many and various meditation practices.

They send out a free meditation newsletter that covers the topics of how to meditate and explains many various meditation techniques, along with a **FREE chapter** from their best-selling manual, "How to Measure and Deepen Your Spiritual Realization".

## ***MARTIAL ARTS***

### **Taijiquan, Classical Yang Style (DVD)**

<http://www.winningvolleyballskills.com/yang.htm>

This instructional DVD will bring you a healthy and relaxed body, a clear mind, and a strong sense of appreciation for this ancient art

### **The Martial Arts Athlete: Mental and Physical Conditioning for Peak Performance**

<http://www.winningvolleyballskills.com/martialathlete.htm>

This book offers invaluable imagery tips, relaxation methods, plyometric drills, weight training drills, mind / body awareness, the

whole 9 yards. It provides information about how to tighten your abs, stretch correctly, heal lower back pain, and improve any sports skill.

All info can be applied to virtually any activity making this book the perfect guide for a novice to an elite athlete.

## ***Other Resources***

### **Five Tibetan Rights**

<http://www.winningvolleyballskills.com/fiverites.htm>

Here are 5 Secrets Used by Tibetan Monks To Boost Energy, Slow Aging, and Tone Muscles

Clients of this system have reported rapidly increased energy levels, physical and mental strength and endurance.

## ***Final thoughts***

All of the above **optional** resources are here to help you develop and strengthen your mental skills as a player or coach. Taking on these suggested activities may or may not fit in with your plans right now, and that's OK.

The important thing to remember is; to reach your optimum performance as an athlete in **any** sport, you should practice being mentally tough, learn to visualize and learn to relax.

You will find that, involving yourself in one or more of the above practices will help speed up your progress and see you as a better and stronger athlete to be reckoned with in the end!

To Your Volleyball Success!

Hayley Merrett

**I'd love to hear your thoughts!**

Did you find this mini book useful? Are you already using some form of mental focus and conditioning techniques to better your game? Have you had any results you'd like to share?

Please feel free to shoot off an email to share your thoughts...  
<mailto:comments@winningvolleyballskills.com>

*Strength does not come from physical capacity; it comes from an indomitable will.*

*- Mahatma Gandhi*