

need to be able to dig down deep and find the courage to move forward.

Tebow's continued pursuit of a dream in the face of extreme adversity is already a great example of the courage it takes to persevere that your players can learn from. However, the manner with which he faces his critics takes him to a new level entirely, as not once has he exploded, vented, snapped or lost his control in any way. That would be the easy way – but, not the courageous way.

As you work with your young athletes, not only can you teach them the importance of persevering to achieve their goals, but also that it takes an enormous amount of class to persevere while sticking to your core values as a person during the toughest of times.

In sports at all levels it's tempting for athletes to blame others for their lack of progress in achieving their goals. But, when youngsters hold themselves

accountable, remain true to themselves, and dig in and simply work even harder when things aren't going their way, that represents the true epitome of perseverance.

And the ultimate sign of a young athlete who exudes class.

Talk to your players about perseverance. Talk to them about class. Share stories of well-known athletes like Tebow, or many of the other great examples out there that your team will relate to, so that they too will embrace those qualities.

Teach your players that regardless of the score, if they did their best that's all you can ask for as a coach.

And as athletes, if they persevered and gave their best – no matter what the outcome – they'll be able to look back on their experiences with a smile on their face.

And as a youth sports coach you can't ask for more than that. **sk**



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## Helping your athletes calm down

Teaching your team to gain control over their nerves through positive thinking and deep breathing can pay big dividends in their performance. By Sara Robinson, MA

### How do you know that one of your athletes is nervous?

Maybe you can see a child tighten his grip on the bat; perhaps your star forward complains of a stomach ache; or your anchor in the relay gets very quiet. Each of your athletes will likely experience nerves at some point in time, and the way that nerves show themselves can be different in every athlete.

As a coach or parent you have the ability to become aware of your athletes' signs and symptoms of being nervous; and you can help them begin to notice these changes as well. Once you and the athlete are aware of what is going on, you can take steps to help change the way they are feeling.

When working with athletes, I explain our nerves in relation to being on a roller coaster. Even if they haven't been on one yet, they have often seen a roller coaster and can understand the comparison. When we get on the roller coaster, we know that the top, and the ultimate drop, is coming. For some, this creates excitement; for others, nerves.



For those who are nervous, it is likely that the nerves build up as the top gets closer. Calm thoughts may change into worries, the stomach could begin to ache, palms might get sweaty, and more. And, instead of enjoying the ride, you are stressed out and nervous. Since we know the drop of the roller coaster is coming, why let ourselves get so worked up? Instead, I teach my athletes to manage their thoughts and feelings along the way to the top. This way, it might still be scary, but it's not as overwhelming as it would be if they let the nervousness build all the way to the top.

her to notice what she is thinking and feeling. By helping athletes pay attention to and talk about what goes on, they will likely become more skilled at noticing these changes as they are occurring.

When an athlete has begun to be aware of what happens when they become nervous, then you can introduce ideas for dealing with nerves. For many athletes there are cognitive and somatic components to nervousness. Simply speaking: there are changes in the mind, and changes in the body when we get nervous. If an athlete's nervousness

can internally say instead. Often, using facts to "argue" with your inner voice can be useful. For example, if a soccer player thinks he won't have a good first touch, he can remind himself of how hard he has trained, or how his first touch in the last game was strong. Athletes often need to repeat the positive statements to override the negative thoughts and worries. The more an athlete works on positive thinking, the more of a habit this will become.

## MANAGING THE BODY

One of the simplest and most effective strategies to calm down and deal with the physical aspects of nervousness is deep breathing. By taking the time to focus on a deep inhale through the nose, and a long slow exhale through the mouth, you actually begin to take control of your heart rate and breathing. Continuing with slow, controlled breathing that allows the lungs to fill and then contract allows oxygen to flow in the body, and this helps to release muscle tension and regulate the internal systems.

Telling an athlete to breathe deeply when nervous is useful, but think about deep breathing as a physical skill – if we want it to be useful, we practice. So, think about incorporating deep breathing into parts of your training.

Athletes will experience nervousness at many points, both on and off the field – think about teaching your athletes to gain control over their nerves through positive thinking and deep breathing. Chances are, these skills will be useful for you as well if you are nervous, or experiencing stress. Lead by example, and both you and your athletes may experience positive changes. **sk**



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## RECOGNIZING CHANGES

The first step to making changes is to notice when change is needed. This is why it is key for you and your athletes to become aware of the unique signs and symptoms of nerves. Some changes will be obvious to observers, though an athlete may not realize what they are doing. Internal changes can be subtle or dramatic; athletes who can notice these changes internally and externally are then ready to manage how they are thinking, feeling, and behaving.

If an athlete is not aware of what happens when she gets nervous, but you can see changes happening, try to check in with her when you see nerves coming on, and ask

affects her mind (negative thoughts, loss of focus, etc.) then we want to work on managing the thoughts, and if an athlete is feeling nervous (shaking, sweating, tightness, etc.), then a physical relaxation strategy is useful.

## MANAGING THE MIND

When an individual gets nervous, she may lose control of her thoughts: worries about what can happen, fears about performing poorly, or comparisons to past negative situations are normal. Confidence can take a dip when an individual is nervous, so getting more control over thoughts and thinking positively despite the worries is an important skill.

Help your athletes be prepared for these worries by planning what they



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