



# SPORTS

Sean Rooney, editor

403.528.5688

sports@medicinehatnews.com



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## Don't neglect the mental component of your game



**Courtney  
Marchesin**  
Training Matters



*Courtney Marchesin, MA, sport psychology consultant, is the mental skills coach for the Alberta Sport Development Centre's athlete enhancement program. She can be contacted at [courtneymarchesin@gmail.com](mailto:courtneymarchesin@gmail.com)*

It's been five years since I wrote my first Training Matters article. Lots has changed over the years, but one thing has remained the same: No matter the athlete, the sport, the level, or the event they're preparing for, mental preparation must be taken seriously. I stand behind that statement and stress the importance of taking action in every article, but let me put it out there in a different way.

Putting your mental game at a higher priority means putting into practice what you preach. We're all guilty of this in our different aspects of our lives. We say one thing, maybe even teach that to others, but fail to incorporate that into our own routines. Why is that? We make excuses, tell ourselves stories, but in the end, we all know what we should be doing.

We are creatures of habit. Our bodies do exactly what they're used to. So, if they're used to being nervous and we never teach them how to relax, well you'd better bet that you'll do exactly as you're used to and you'll be just as nervous at your next event. Waiting until you need something is the wrong time to introduce it into your habits. Practice makes permanent, and if you're not practising it, it is not going to happen. It's as simple as that.

The more you repeat something, the more it will stick. That is why your coach, mom, wife, teacher, friend, or whomever, will repeat the same thing over and over to you. Because by doing so, eventually, it'll stick! We do that with our training, do we not? We go to the gym, we complete the exercises we know are developing certain muscle groups to better our physical selves for whatever our sport demands. Day in and day out, we repeat these, until our body just seems to know the proper technique, positioning, and so forth.

Yet, when it comes to mental training, there is never the same conscious and consistent practice. Often athletes will think about it when someone talks to them about a specific component of their mental game, and then forget about it by the next day. Alas, it will never improve. It is brushed under the rug, you head back to the gym, and you try and work out your frustrations instead of really dealing with them head on.

Working on your mental game does not make you weird! It does not make you weak, less than, or inferior to anyone. In fact, taking the responsibility to add a mental training component to your conditioning gives you that competitive edge that everyone seems to strive for. Think about it; do you ever hear on TV, sportscasters talking about athletes and their need to get their heads in the game? Again, mental training importance spans every level, and those athletes that take it seriously will see some serious results.

So I challenge you, perhaps as a delayed New Year's resolution, to really focus on your mental game and mental strength this year. Make a conscious effort to be consistently training your mental skills, using the mental skills I've presented in the Training Matters articles. Start evaluating yourself, respecting yourself, and growing your competitive edge. By adding mental training to your regular, every day training schedule, you'll start to form new habits that will in turn build your mental strength. Mental training then simply becomes a part of your training, not something extra you have to think about. Again, practice makes permanent. With permanent training will come optimum results. So do yourself a favour and get started with this new you today.