

Are you mentally beating Yourself?



Sports are a competitive arena in which the object of any game or match is for one team to beat the other. Coaches and players train and prepare to put their best efforts forward and ensure that they come out on the winning side. However, some actions and thoughts that come up during the process of preparation — and during the competition itself — might give the other side the upper hand.

When we say, “beating yourself,” we are talking about how *your* actions and thoughts keep you from being ready to perform at your best level. Mental toughness and preparation ensure that your thoughts and actions are at the right level for your best performance.

If you are not ready to compete at your peak level, face up to obstacles and setbacks, and give your all, then you are beating yourself. Ask yourself the following questions, and answer honestly:

1. Do I always find something wrong with my play?
2. Do I run over in my mind everything I did wrong during and after my games?
3. When I get a bad call in a game, do I blame the officials, my teammates or someone else?



If you answered yes to these questions, you are beating yourself. **You are in your own way!** Remember, the only power these negative thoughts have over you is the power that *you* give them.

Let's look at three areas to help break down these self-imposed barriers.

#1 Preparation

Being prepared is the easiest way to ensure you don't beat yourself. This simply involves taking care of responsibilities on and off the field so that you can confidently take on your opponent and compete at a high level.



Training seriously, with the desire to improve and be consistent, is important to the process of preparation. It makes you physically and tactically prepared. You also want to be physically prepared by ensuring your body is in good shape, and by getting the right nutrients and the right amount of rest.

Are you practicing at game speed? If you are taking shortcuts, giving 50 percent effort on the practice field and not taking

care of yourself properly off the field, then you will have sold yourself short and will not be prepared to perform at your best level.

#2 Mental toughness

Participating and excelling in sports is very much a mental exercise. It is about having the strength to make the sacrifices needed to be prepared. It also requires the right mental makeup to recover from setbacks — both small and large — to reach a set goal.

The way you respond to adversity determines your success in your chosen sport and is one of the most important life skills that sports teach. It takes mental toughness to react positively toward a fluky goal, a blown defensive assignment which leads to your team being scored on, or a string of losses and bad performances. Your reaction here is the key to not beating yourself. The correct reaction to things not going your way can propel you to new heights, but the wrong response is an act of endless self-defeat.



"I've never known anybody to achieve anything without overcoming adversity." — *Lou Holtz, Pro Football Player, Author, and College Football Hall of Fame Coach.*

#3 How to approach setbacks



Performing at your peak level also means knowing how to use setbacks as learning experiences. They provide opportunities to reflect and self-evaluate in ways that winning does not. The insights you gain about training, readiness, and execution can be invaluable to your efforts to improve. It is, after all, a learning *process* — always a journey and never a destination.

Setbacks and bad patches are a part of sports and life in general. The fact is that, as prepared as you may be, things happen. You will have a lapse of concentration or commit a mistake, and luck will also play a role in outcomes. Competing at your best level means ensuring that when things do go wrong (and they will), it doesn't become a trend that derails your success.

This means bouncing back in the right manner when you make mistakes. For the best of the best, mistakes are events that happen once in a while, not repeatedly. How an elite athlete reacts to these

setbacks is what makes them so special. They refuse to get down on themselves, immediately put the event behind them as "history" and refocus on winning. As long as the game is not over, they are focused on the WIN!

Beating yourself up

It's fair to say that if Tom Brady had hung his head after throwing a pick-6 in the first half of the 2017 Super Bowl, we would not have witnessed that amazing second-half comeback win. Mentally tough athletes are aware that getting unhappy and becoming negative about mistakes, bad performances and losses does nothing but weigh you down and hold you back from achieving your goals.

There's no use sulking and beating yourself up. Your opponent won't wait for you to stop sulking before you compete, but they will gladly take advantage of you if you are distracted in any way. Don't forget that the other team can see you are beating yourself up and will be glad to do what they can to "get in your head." The next time you make a mistake in a game setting, don't dwell on it. Just identify what you did wrong and get it right next time. Is there time left on the clock? Then keep playing!

At the end of the day, it is you who makes the most difference in whether you perform at your best level. And if you perform your best — with the required energy, dedication, and mental fortitude — you can be confident knowing that you didn't beat yourself. Even if you lose, you played 100% of your game.



Tell yourself the following before each game:

1. I am human. I make mistakes, and I choose not to replay them over and over in my head.
2. Mistakes are always worse in my mind than the world's.
3. I am committed to being the athlete I set out to become, and **victory starts with MY thinking!**

Remember, you are beating yourself up because you are *trying* to do something — win! Kids that sit on the sofa watching TV never make mistakes... Don't forget to give yourself a break!