

# Sport Psychology for Junior Rowers

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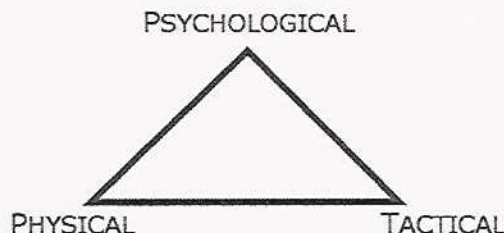
## PSYCHOLOGICAL SKILLS AND ROWING PERFORMANCE

What percentage of rowing is mental? What percentage of mistakes you have made in practice or competition were "mental" mistakes? How much of your practice time do you spend on mental skills?

Your answers to these questions will help you determine whether you need to improve your mental approach to rowing. All sport performance is 100% mental! Your body literally does not move a muscle without input from your brain. Negative emotional states, anxiety, fear, poor concentration, tension, pain and outside distractions all interfere with performance.

Elite athletes already know this fact. They have developed, and consistently practice the mental skills needed for optimal performance.

### PERFORMANCE TRIAD



Mental skills are just one part of a performance triad. Physical factors include conditioning and nutrition. Tactical factors include technique and race strategy. Mental skills are the psychological tools athletes can use to enhance their learning, training and performance. These skills do *not* replace physical training, but they can help you increase your ability to stay focused, handle adversity, control tension and anxiety, and stay confident in your abilities when performing under pressure.

Once you have developed a program of skills and tools you can use to improve your performance. All you have to do is...

***Practice, Practice, and Practice!***

## SKILLS FOR FINDING PEAK PERFORMANCE

Developing skills in the following areas can help you consistently achieve a mental state that is ripe for a peak performance.

**Self-Awareness** of one's strengths, limitations, thoughts and feelings teaches you about your performance and your self.

**Clear Goals** that focus primarily on the process of performance rather than the outcome.

**Energy Management Skills** allow you to regulate your energy, arousal and tension. Learn and practicing effective relaxation and "psyching up" strategies.

**Imagery Skills**, when done effectively can enhance technique development, competition preparation, and self-confidence.

**Cognitive Skills** such as self-talk, focusing skills, and cue words can help you handle distractions and stay in the present.

Once learned, these skills can be applied to any performance situation. This program of mental skills will include an honest assessment and evaluation of your current mental strategies and your commitment to improving.





## SET 'SMARTER' GOALS FOR BETTER PERFORMANCE

What is your mission for the coming competitive season? What vision do you have of the success you want achieve? What do you like about rowing competitively? What are you going to do today to accomplish this mission?

Top athletes have learned to stay motivated and focused through a long season, through winter conditioning and through those periods when things just don't seem to be going their way. One of the tools they use is goal setting. There are a few basic principles to follow when setting goals.

**Outcome goals** focus on results. Winning a race or qualifying for a regional or national event are outcome goals. These goals can motivate you and guide you, but they are not always completely under your control.

**Process goals** are the action goals that focus on specific aspects of performance. Process goals are what you fall back on day-to-

day, week-to-week to stay focused. These goals are the core of your mental game.

**Dream big for the long term; think realistically in the short term.**

### 'SMARTER' Goals

Use this guide when setting your goals.

- S** – Specific
- M** – Measurable
- A** – Action-oriented
- R** – Realistic
- T** – Timely
- E** – Exciting
- R** – Recorded

## THE MOST IMPORTANT GOAL

The absolute most important goal you can set for yourself is self-acceptance. No matter how you perform this season, no matter what anybody says about you or your performance, make it your personal goal to accept yourself as a worthy person.

## TIME FRAME FOR GOAL SETTING

**Long-term** goals cover the season or the year. You'll only need 1 or 2.

**Intermediate-term** goals should cover a week, a month, or a pre-season.

**Short-term** goals are clear, specific and action-oriented process goals covering 2-4 days.

**Daily goals.** What are you doing *today* to achieve your vision? What are you doing right now?

**Make fun your goal too!**



## 'SMARTER' Goals cont'd

Specific goals describe exactly what you want to occur. What do you have to do in order to row fast (i.e., what is the process goal for rowing fast)? That should be your goal. For example, a goal of *moving to the start line feeling confident and relaxed* (which will enable you to row better) is more specific than saying, *do my best*.

Measurable goals can be objectively measured by you or by someone else. Using the above example, you can rate your feeling of confidence and relaxation on a 1 -10 scale. Some athletes choose to monitor their pulse as a way of tracking their tension level.

Action-oriented means that your goal dictates that you *do* something to achieve an end. Example, if your not relaxed at the start line, taking a deep breath and using your self-talk to calm down.

Realistic goals look for a balance between ability and challenge. Easy goals won't motivate you and goals that are too difficult will discourage you.

Timely means keep focused on something current that is related to your goal. If your goal is nationals in May, have intermediate, short-term and daily goals that take you there.

Exciting! Set goals that have some meaning for you. Let yourself feel good about your performance without regard to outcome.

Record your goals in your mental log. Review, evaluate and adjust them as needed.

## MORE GOAL SETTING BASICS

Here are some more tips to follow when setting your goals.

Remember that goal setting is a process that takes time, thought and effort. Try to avoid coming up with all your goals in one night.

Be flexible. If a goal isn't working, make an adjustment!

Make your goals public.

Tell mom, dad, friends, coaches, and teammates. Be sure to tell people who will be

supportive of

your working toward your goals.

Focus on process goals that are related directly to improving your performance.

Set goals for practice and competition.

Use positive language only! State what you *want* to do (row well) instead of what you want to avoid (don't catch a crab).

Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any other one thing.

Abraham Lincoln