

"PLAYING NOT TO LOSE IS OFTEN A RECIPE FOR DISASTER!"

In this ultra competitive world of athletics, one of the more important psychological phenomenons is: Playing Not to Lose. What often seems like a safe and sound way to prepare an athlete for success is more often a recipe for disastrous disappointment. And here's why...

When athletes play *NOT TO LOSE* there is an underlying fear of that potential loss. In order to battle through and conquer this fear, athletes often turn to thoughts of what they will not do as they prepare for a big competition. The *NOT TO LOSE* strategy often sounds something like this: "*DON'T FALSE START,*" "*DON'T DQ,*" and most critical to the strategy, "*JUST DON'T LOSE!*" How could such preparation become a recipe for a loss?

Simply put, the brain doesn't process the words Do Not in the way that we would like. What happens when I suggest, "Do not think about a Purple Elephant with Black Pokka dots." I said DON'T think about that elephant! What happened was your brain's way of thinking about don't. Your brain pulled up a memory of an elephant, manipulated the color, added the Pokka dots, and finally reminded you NOT to think about that again. The same thing happens when an athlete has thoughts of DON'T LOSE. Their brain creates an image of that loss and then plans not to think about that again. To make matters worse, those thoughts become a form of mental imagery. The result is visualizing the *JUST (DON'T) LOSE*, and who would choose to intentionally practice that?

The impact that this preparation has during competition is a self-fulfilling prophecy of the loss. Athletes who have been practicing thoughts of what they won't do are often on the look out for those plays or problems. Because they have actually been seeing the errors during their mental imagery they are now more likely to perform to that mistake during the meet. Once the error has occurred, that's all the athlete needs to fulfill the rest of the prophecy... the loss. The spiral downward begins and all the don'ts they have been practicing begin to unravel.

Luckily, these thoughts can be changed! If you are an athlete preparing *NOT TO LOSE*, contact Dr. Casey for a constructive way to approach your meets with a *WINNING MENTALITY*.

Dr. Casey Cooper, Sport Psychologist

www.drcaseycooper.com

(949) 420-3067