

Baseball

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5 WAYS
TO CALM THE NERVES
— AND —

PLAY LIKE
YOU PRACTICE



WITH
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5 Ways to Calm the Nerves and Play Like You Practice

Bringing your “A Game” from practice to the game isn’t something that just a few weak minded players struggle with, it’s something ALL players struggle with to some degree.

Jitters/tension/doubt/fear can really limit a players performance on gameday.

However there are proven techniques you can use to excel in games just as you do in practice. Here are 5 of my favorites:

1. Reinterpret Your Reactions

If you get a jittery stomach before a game or your heart races under pressure, you’re not “nervous”, you’re “amped”.

The physiological reactions you’re feeling is usually what's called the "Fight or Flight Response" which is a dose of adrenaline designed to kick the body's systems into high gear to run or fight in a dangerous situation.

Though nothing on the baseball field is "fight or flight" worthy, you can use this to your advantage.

Like, back when I would pitch, I always had a couple extra MPH on my fastball during the games that I could never reach in practice.

Same at the plate, if I was able to calm my nerves and not be jumpy (a problem for me) I often seemed stronger and faster.

So change the way you think about these emotions. When you feel those jitters think “My body is really getting itself ready, this is great.”

That little extra juice that comes from the emotions your body feels is helpful, so label it as such.

2. Distract Yourself

Hitting is so mental because of all of the dead time during an at bat. It'd be like icing the kicker 5 times before his kick.

You want hitting to be automatic, a thinking free activity.

But without a job the mind will interfere and start to worry - the mind always defaults to worry!

The swing can become both hesitant and forced from over-trying and indecision.

So give the mind a job.

Have a song that you sing in your head between pitches.

Or "feel" your feet (Shawn Green would hit his cleats with his bat to get them to tingle and focus on that sensation) to get your mind out of head.

You can also read the letters backwards on your bat.

Give that mind a job and allow the body to do what you trained it to do!

3. Focus on the goal...not mechanics

Athletes often focus on elements of their technique that they believe will help enhance their performance (i.e "Keep front shoulder in", "soft stride", etc).

Several studies have proven the technique focus actually decreases performance more than had they never paid any attention to it in the first place.

Some psychologists encourage focusing on a key word related to the outcome of the intended action.

Instead of thinking of physical elements of the swing (such as stride, head, hands, etc) think of a word that encapsulates the swing as a whole (such as "smooth", "clean", or "quick")

Focusing on the outcome of your actions in this manner helps your brain organize all of the processes needed to actually produce the end result.

4. Practice Under Pressure.

The old adage that practice makes perfect could use a bit of an adjustment.

Practicing under the same conditions you will face in a do-or-die situation is exactly what is needed to perform your best when the stress is on.

In the brainiac world they call this exposure therapy.

(People are exposed to what they fear in small doses)

The competition is what many players fear, and by experiencing more of it during practice lets the player get used to pressure and make will make game time less intimidating.

Now, recreating the *actual* pressure of certain real game situations is tough - if not impossible - but even light amounts of pressure have improved results.

Instead of just taking a bunch of swings in batting practice, keep score of the good swings - make it a game with a friend.

Loser has to carry the winner's bag, rake the field etc.

Something needs to be on the line.

Practicing under game like intensity can have huge results.

5. Act as If

Another technique used by high performers involves visualization. Here's a great quote from "The Inner Game of Tennis":

With our athletes we use a type of role playing. We say, 'Imagine that I am the director of a television series. Knowing that you are an actor that plays tennis, I ask if you would like to do a bit part as a top-flight tennis player. I assure you that you needn't worry about hitting the ball out or into the net because the camera will only be focused on you and will not follow the ball. What I'm mainly interested in is that you adopt professional mannerisms, and that you swing your racket with super self-assurance.

"Above all, your face must express no self doubt. You should look as if you are hitting every ball exactly where you want to. Really get into the role, hit as hard as you like and ignore where the ball is actually going."

Imagine what a great hitter would feel in this situation, and act the same way!

Apply just a few of these techniques to your routine and watch your game day results skyrocket– and you’ll have a competitive advantage over those who are left unequipped to deal with their nerves for the rest of your career!

Always feel free to contact me with questions (the Baseball Notes facebook page is best)

Good luck and go get after it!! :)



– *Clint McGill*

