



THE MENTAL EDGE

CAN NEW AGE MIND TRAINING PRODUCE GOLD?

by Kelly Gorven



ATHLETE RITUALS

While some athletes turn to mental visualization to prepare for an upcoming competition, others have even quirkier rituals to get them in the zone.

> **Michael Jordan** used to wear his college basketball shorts underneath his Chicago Bulls shorts during every game.

> **Jason Terry** of the Dallas Mavericks wears the shorts of the opposing team to bed the night before a game. During the game, he wears five socks all pulled up to his knees.

> **Turk Wendell** always had four pieces of liquorice candy in his mouth. After every inning, he would brush his teeth and when it was time to go back to the mound, he'd pop in four more pieces.

> **Patrick Roy** would skate backwards toward the net and turn around at the last second because he believed the act made the goal shrink. During the game, he would chat with the posts.

The 2012 Summer Olympics are upon us, and, with them, comes excitement from fans across the world, preparing to support their nation. Athletes, too, are preparing, but in a bit of a different way. They're doing everything that they can to make those loyal fans proud – including partaking in mental visualization.

You may be asking, mental visualization? Yeah, it might be hokey-sounding, but the new age training method is being embraced by some athletes as another tool in their arsenal.

Mental visualization is the practice of creating a mental image, focusing on a desired goal, and repeating those images with the goal of making it a reality. It's Psychology 101, really, and also referred to as guided imagery, mental rehearsal, or meditation. According to its proponents in the world of athletics, this form of training can be the difference between medaling or not.

"It's important that we know what we want and believe it can happen," says Barbara Guerra, President of NewReality Canada, a company that sells guided imagery aids. "Once we have a belief, it operates in a powerful way."

NewReality Canada sells a system they call Transformational Guided Imagery with devices that help one reach a relaxed state, allowing for the creation of mental images. Most recently, this form of training was

picked up by former NHL player Jason Woolley, who used it with a young hockey team in Alberta. A combination of music sounds from an MP3 player and lighting from special LED glasses help create a state of relaxation.

There are four types of brain waves – beta, alpha, theta, and delta. Theta is known as the "peak mental state" – the state in which absence of thought can be achieved. It's technically a meditated state where all conscious thoughts are eliminated and individuals tend to have higher levels of creativity. NewReality's devices are designed to help get the brain to this state.

Michael Phelps, an American world-record-holding Olympic swimmer, is a prime example of an athlete combining physical prowess with mental visualization. In a recent television advertising campaign, he says, "two things I need before a race – music, and the confidence to win. It's about getting my head in the right place, seeing every stroke, every turn, and every breath."

Essentially, mental visualization leans on the law of attraction theory, which dates back to the early 1900s. It's

the idea that being positive brings positivity and being negative brings negativity.

"It's very simple, but very complex in the same way," says Guerra.

For those who've practiced it effectively, mental visualization can reduce stress, diminish fears, eliminate distractions, and build confidence.

An example: In 1943, the world record for the one-mile race was set at four minutes and two seconds. At one point, it was a record deemed impossible to break. In 1954, however, Roger Bannister, a former British Olympic track runner, knocked two seconds off of the record. That same year, John Landy of Australia took two more seconds off of Bannister's time. Bannister and Landy both said that they made the so-called impossible possible because they believed that they could.

Olympic athletes wouldn't be where they are today if it weren't for their physical training. But it's those who've mastered their mind that have a leg-up on fellow competitors.

"People who have been successful in anything, specifically athletes, know that they have to rehearse results in their mind before putting their body to the test," says Guerra. "Practicing in the mind is just as powerful as physically doing it. Action is necessary, but strategic action is the most powerful tool."

Performing back flips and handstands with grace while maintaining balance on an apparatus only four inches wide; completing one last turn before a few seconds of hard dolphin kicks underwater prior to resurfacing and stroking as hard as possible to the finish; predicting the way in which an opponent is going to duck when the first, second, and third hit is thrown – they're all examples of mental visualization.

"Visualization is a very powerful tool," claims Guerra. "It can be used for anything

including earning money, finding success, quitting smoking, overcoming addictions, and battling cancer. You have to visualize what you want, feel the excitement as if you have it, and allow yourself to step into it."

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