



The Great Unknown



Will I be able to play this season? What will I do with all this extra time? Is this the end of my high school career? How will this affect my chances of being recruited? All valid questions, and all questions that won't be answered for some time. That doesn't make you feel much better, does it?

The cool thing about your involvement in high school athletics is that you've undoubtedly picked up skills that transfer over to other difficult times – if you let them. The grit and resilience you've developed all this time often comes in the form of training different mental skills, whether you've been doing it on purpose or not.

From seasons ending early to moving to online learning, we seem to be sitting with a lot of uncertainty about the future.

Here are five ways to keep your mental game sharp in the midst of the unknown.

Keep doing the little things

It's normal to feel stressed and anxious about not knowing what's going to happen next. When this happens, your brain tries it's best to make sense of it all, the only problem is that the pieces don't always fit nicely together like a puzzle. While things can feel complicated and confusing, find a way to simplify the process and focus on the things you can control – no matter how big or small they might be. Still shoot to be 1% better each day.

Don't quit your daydream

There's a good chance you daydreamed in class and I'd be willing to bet that those thoughts would occasionally wander to a drill you've been working on, or that upcoming competition. While I don't suggest you spend time daydreaming instead of focusing on class, I am saying that your daydreams included a lot of important parts of visualization – a fundamental mental skill. As your brain doesn't know the difference between what's real and what's imagined, spend time each day visualizing something related to your sport that you'd like to improve. Let's shoot to keep your visualizations in 1st person, vivid, in real time, and with realistic outcomes.

Be nice to yourself.

Hold the eyeroll for just a second and hear me out on this one. It's easy to think that the only way to improve is to push harder and harder, expecting perfection. The reality of life is that there's very little we have control over, so let's not make it harder on ourselves. Sometimes cutting yourself some slack is the very thing that will help you get out of your own way.

Breathe

Intentionally bringing your attention to your breath is one of the most basic things you can do continue to train your mental game away from practice. Carve out 5 minutes, 5 days a week to focus on nothing but your breath. Focus on breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth, having your exhale be longer than your inhale.

Sleep is your friend

But not your best friend. Getting 7-9 hours remains as important now as it was when you were in season because your body and mind need time to recover, but it is possible to sleep too much. Hard to believe? I know. Find a routine that works for you and stick with it. Regular (and restful) sleep will help you with decision making and help speed up overall physical recovery.