

The Art of Mental Training

Chapter 17

Too Intense

<http://www.DefenseOnDemand.com>

Copyright © 2006 by Daniel Gonzalez. All rights reserved.

Sometimes in competitive situations an athlete can actually get *too* energized before the start of competition, thus sabotaging his own performance. You see it a lot in grappling tournaments where (due to sheer over-enthusiasm) some amateur athletes rev up their engines to fever pitch before even stepping out on to the mat. What they fail to understand is that coming in too high on the performance curve will actually end up hurting their performance.

Years ago, this kept happening to an athlete that I was helping to train. No matter how much he visualized calmness, coolness and control, no sooner did the day of the competition dawn than he was crackling with anticipation and incapable of even eating for sheer excitement! The result was that, although he tended to start out powerfully, he was too energized, and it hurt his performance. His competitors soon had him on the defensive. This was very frustrating for him, until he learned through practice how to adjust the level of intensity at which he entered into competition. By learning to adjust his intensity down by just a notch or two as he entered competition, the athlete began to win more often.

A good mental athlete learns early on at what level of intensity he plays his best game. On a scale of one to ten (with ten being at the most intense level) most top athletes report that they perform best at around levels seven or eight. Occasionally, of course, they may need to call on their full intensity, and “raise their game” to nine or ten. But they still know that this is not the ideal level of intensity at which to enter a competition.

By getting to know at what level of intensity he should begin, the mental athlete has a big advantage. He is helping to create the conditions needed in order for him to perform really well. He manages his intensity so it doesn't interfere with his best game. It's a simple concept that can make a vital difference—yet so few amateurs are aware of it! You can't rev yourself up to a level ten each time and expect to consistently perform at your best. Your neuro-muscular connections are able to deliver better physical technique as you learn to throttle back your level of intensity.

Self-analysis and advice from people you trust will help you to pinpoint precisely at what level of intensity you generally find your best game. Try to make a note of what pre-game routine worked to help get you to the exact level where you are most effective, and then practice arriving at your ideal intensity level at exactly the right moment. Learn to manage all that valuable intensity.

Remember: you have to learn to control yourself before standing a chance of controlling your game. Getting your intensity revved up too powerfully prior to competition will actually hurt your performance.