



Keys to Staying Process Focused

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The ability to concentrate is critical to successful performance in all sports, especially in baseball. During each game, you have to turn your concentration on and off several times. When it is time to go to the plate, you have to turn on the concentration.

Total concentration is the ability to immerse yourself in a task without becoming distracted or pulled off task. Great players talk about concentration as being "in a bubble," or "in a cocoon" during which nothing can penetrate their focus. Concentration involves several elements. These include (1) knowing what cues to focus on; (2) staying focused on those relevant cues; (3) keeping a narrow and external focus; (4) the ability to shift attention when needed; (5) the ability to refocus when distracted; and (6) controlling your thought process. In this article, I discuss specific methods for sticking to the process and improving your focus.

(1) Stay Present Focused. To play your best, you must keep your mind in the present moment on the requirements of the task. This is easier said than done. It is easy to think about the last strike out you had or think ahead about the results of striking out. Know the task-specific cues you should focus on and be aware when you are not on task. Stop and refocus your mind on the task or on what you should think about to execute well.

(2) Only One At-Bat at a Time. To help you stay focused on execution, think about only the one pitch at a time. Separate each pitch from the rest and don't think about the consequences of getting a hit. You don't want to be thinking about the last inning when you are at the plate in the middle of the game.

(3) Don't Think Results. If you want to tighten up and make a controlled swing, then think about what you don't want to do. Thinking about results, only creates tension and indecision. If you want to get good results, focus on execution. In an earlier article, I discussed how your at-bat routine



should help you focus on specific cues to follow as you prepare for each at-bat. If you don't have a routine, the mind is free to wander aimlessly as you prepare for each pitch.

(4) Cue Yourself to Concentrate. Sometimes it's hard to refocus when the last at-bat was 30 minutes ago. Lock in your concentration once it is your turn to at the plate. To help you click in, try using a physical trigger to focus your mind, such as tightening the Velcro on your glove before start. At this point you want to turn your attention to preparation and execution for the first pitch, and if anything else enters your mind, let it pass through your mind.

(5) Relax Your Focus While You Wait. Not to many people can focus continuously three hours. It is important to be ready to play when you are up, but you don't want to grind and overanalyze the entire game. After each at-bat, relax your focus and save your concentration for the next time at-bat. This will help you be "fresher" for the end of the round.

(6) Rehearse While You Wait. If you have trouble focusing your mind after a long delay, rehearse your at-bat before your up to play. For example, while on deck, imagine that you are at the plate taking pitches. You should be timing your swing with the pitcher and "seeing" yourself make solid contact. When it's your turn, you will be prepared to click in the focus because you have already rehearsed your routine.

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