



Preparation

Lesson Companion

Teaching this lesson? Here are some tips:

Tight on time? Stick with the 3 Key Takeaways and The Basics. These will help your athletes learn the importance and how-tos of proper preparation before a game or competition.

Have more time? Share the TrueSport Talk with your athletes and discuss how an Olympic athlete can relate to this lesson.

Extra time? Continue on through Tips & Applications for more valuable information to share with your group.

Looking for more? Explore the Downloads & Additional Resources which offer additional conversation starters and fun physical activities to support each lesson.



Preparation




“Success is where preparation and opportunity meet. — Bobby Unser”

3 Key Takeaways

— 1 —

A pre-game routine increases opportunities for success and builds confidence.




— 2 —

Positive self-talk and an encouraging mindset are two tools that will encourage good results.



— 3 —

Visualization is a technique that will promote success in competition.



The Basics

Preparation is not just laying out your uniform the night before a big competition. It begins months before, when you develop patterns that connect your mind and body and allow you to focus on training and competition. There are three main components to preparation, all of which give you the tools to stay focused, achieve the best possible outcome, and link the body and mind together.

1. A Pre-Game Routine

Prior to competition, you should have a consistent, reliable routine that gets you ready to focus and be in the moment. You should repeat it during practice so that you are almost on autopilot when game time comes. A pre-game routine can have multiple elements, ranging from smaller rituals like always putting your left shoe on before your right, to longer ones like breathing exercises, meditation, or eating a healthy meal. You can also use rituals during competition, like before a serve in tennis or a pitch in baseball.

2. Visualize the Outcome

This technique is an effective way to practice your sport without taxing your body. You run through a successful game/race/inning/shot in your mind, using your senses: How do you feel? What do you see? Hear? It's important that the visualization always ends with the desired outcome, and calling up the same positive images repeatedly actually enhances your physical skills.

3. Positive Self Talk

When you make a mistake in training or while competing, it's easy to immediately criticize yourself. Instead of letting your mindset turn negative, develop a mantra—a short phrase which you can repeat—that keeps you on task. It could be something inspirational like “Believe”; something personal like “I can do this”; or something technique-oriented like, “Stay steady and smooth.”

TrueSport Talk



Bobsledder Steve Mesler, a gold medalist in the 2010 Winter Olympics, discusses preparation and how it can improve athletic performance. Steve understood the importance of having a simple routine during the training days leading up to his Olympic competition. His plan was to set a pattern that he practiced every day, so that when the race came he could simply focus on the routine and avoid any distractions.

Steve and his Olympic teammate, Justin Olsen, were responsible for pushing on the same side of the four-man bobsled. They needed a routine that focused on their timing so they could maximize their ability to accelerate the 552-pound sled. Steve and Justin created the command “1-2-3 HIT” which they repeated out loud before each practice run throughout their training. By focusing on that simple sentence and returning to the basics, Steve and Justin were able to polish their routine, which came in handy when they were competing under pressure. Implementing a pre-competition schedule and focusing on the process was a significant factor in their four-man bobsled team winning the Olympic gold medal, a first for the U.S. in over 62 years.



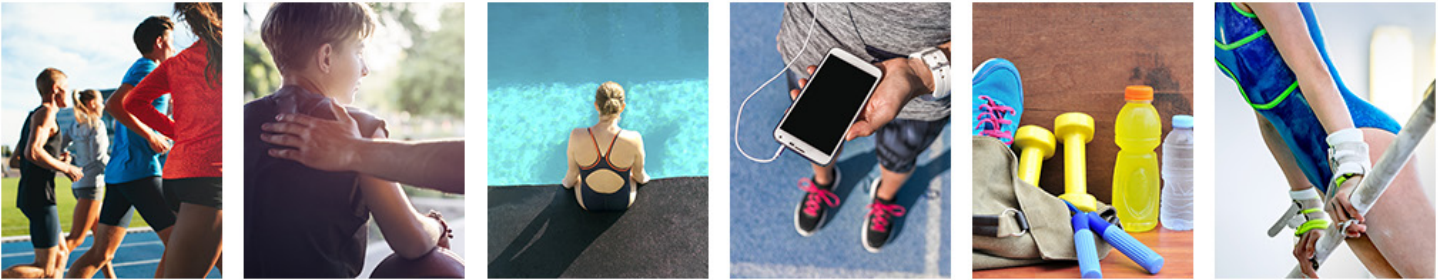
TrueSport Talk Questions

1. *What was the main point you took away from the lesson?*
2. *Do you think Steve's team could have won the gold medal without a pre-game routine and their 1-2-3 HIT command? Why or why not?*
3. *Do you have a pre-game or pre-training routine? If not, what are some ways you could integrate a basic one?*

Pre-Game Routine

The more you practice a pre-game routine during training, the more familiar and soothing it will feel to your body and mind prior to competition. You don't need to include everything in the list below, and if you have something else you'd like to add, feel free to do so. A good pre-game routine could include:

- Getting a good night's sleep the night before the game
- Packing your uniform and gear
- Dressing in a certain order
- Eating a nutritious meal or snack
- Listening to music
- Taking time for visualization and/or breathing exercises
- Talking to your teammates in order to stay loose and feel connected
- Reading something meaningful, like quotes or a letter to yourself
- Getting taped up if necessary
- Talking to your coach about the focus of the game and/or your play
- A team meeting
- A physical warm-up: yoga, running drills and/or stretching
- Drills specific to your sport and/or position



Keys To Visualization

A technique used by athletes that gives them a mental edge over the competition is visualization, or the process of creating a mental image or intention of what you want to happen or feel in reality. The more you are able to visualize a competitive situation or a skill you want to improve, the greater your chances are for success.

It is important to finish with a positive result while practicing mental imagery scenarios and make it a habit by practicing before, during and after competition. These mental scenarios can include any of these sense: visual (images and pictures), kinesthetic (how the body feels), or auditory (the roar of the crowd). A few tips to get you started:

Find a quiet place to visualize.

Two options could be before you fall asleep at night or when you wake up in the morning.

Be relaxed before you start.

An easy way to do this is to take ten deep breaths (in through your nose, out through your mouth) before you begin.

Be inside your own body as much as possible.

While it may be helpful to occasionally “watch” yourself performing well, feeling the sensations with all your senses as vividly as possible is most effective.

Always achieve success in your visualization.

If you’re a tennis player, you’re serving aces and winning the match. If you’re a goalie, you’re stopping every shot. If you’re a hurdler, you’re clearing every hurdle and winning the race.

That said, don’t just picture a perfect day.

Imagine playing on a windy day or running in the rain or having a teammate out with an injury. Bringing in situations that are out of your control and still seeing a positive outcome is extremely helpful.

Positive Self-Talk

When you make a mistake in competition or the training becomes really intense, it’s helpful to have a mantra to get your mind back on track instead of dwelling on the error or tuning into the pain. One way to do this is to repeat a mantra, which is a short word or phrase that has meaning to you and fills you with confidence, inspiration, and power. Here are a few mantras of Olympic athletes:



“I got this.”

Laurie Hernandez
Olympic gymnast



“Because I can.”

Kristin Armstrong
Olympic cyclist



“Breath, believe, & battle.”

Kerri Walsh
Olympic beach volleyball player



“To give anything less than your best, is to sacrifice the gift.”

Allyson Felix
Olympic sprinter
quote by Steve Prefontaine

Be sure to check out these additional resources available for download:

Chalk Talk (PDF)

15-minute activity: Reinforce the importance of proper preparation with this short guided discussion.

Activities (PDF)

15 & 20-minute activities: These all-ages activities will both relax your athletes and teach them how to visualize a desired outcome.

Team Player Worksheet (PDF)

Handout: Keep this handout nearby to help your athletes relax before competition or when you want to work on their visualization technique.

TrueSport Certificate (PDF)

Lesson Certificate: Celebrate your group's completion of the TrueSport Preparation lesson with this special certificate.