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 and recovery before and after 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

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.”

Recovery

Your training session or competition does not end when you step off the field. In fact, recovering properly after practice or a game is extremely important so that you have more energy, fresh muscles, and a focused mind next time you play. Recovery is split into three main categories:

1. Sleep
Getting enough rest on a daily basis is vital not just for physical recovery, but studies prove that sleep—or lack thereof—directly influences memory, creativity, weight maintenance, academic skills, stress, and depression.

2. Refuel
Eating the correct foods and properly hydrating after a hard game or practice—and eating healthy meals daily—will maximize recovery.

3. Get Perspective
Being able to step away from your sport for a break at the end of a season will rejuvenate your spirit and enthusiasm for the sport.
Gymnast Chellsie Memmel, a silver medalist in the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, knows what it means to be an athlete with a demanding schedule. Throughout Chellsie’s career, her recovery plan changed with her training locations and as she learned more about her body. Eventually, she learned the importance of having a plan for post-competition recovery and what her body needed to feel its best every week. Chellsie would go on walks or read books to give her body and mind a break, knowing that a rested mind and body often guaranteed good results. She learned her recovery plan needed to also include rest, nutrition, and hydration.

The habits Chellsie developed over time allowed her to recover and replenish her body, which in turn, helped her maximize her performance and feel more prepared in practice and competition. Feeling her best allowed her to increase her opportunities for success and built confidence. Chellsie believes that both preparation and recovery are crucial elements of athletic success. She knows from experience the habits take time to develop, but the benefits of practicing both are absolutely worth the investment.

TrueSport athletes understand the importance of preparing for competition, recovering their mind, and listening to their body before and after competition.

AMBASSADOR STORY QUESTIONS

1. What was the main point you took away from the ambassador story?

2. What was interested about this story and how the athlete prepared for competition?

3. How can you practice better preparation habits during your athletic season?
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:
Tips & Applications

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:

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.

“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
Post-Season Recovery: The Mind

When a season winds down, taking a break from your sport is essential so you can come back feeling fresh and excited about the next season. Whether your break is just two weeks or many months, take time to do the things you may not have been able to do when you were deep in competition. (For a good way to wrap up a season, fill out the worksheet in the handout section.)

These activities could include seeing movies, hanging out with friends, playing another sport (most top-level athletes were multi-sport athletes in high school), taking a class, picking up a hobby, or spending extra time on homework.

You can certainly still work on aspects of your training or skills that you’d like to improve—talk to your coach about what off-season drills and/or camps might be good for you—but don’t let them dominate your free time. If you were injured during your season, be sure to rehab and strengthen that area to minimize the chances of reinjury.
Be sure to check out these additional resources available for download:

**Chalk Talk (PDF)**
15-minute activity: Reinforce the importance of proper preparation & recovery with this short guided discussion.

**Activity Review Handouts**
15 & 20-minute activities: These all-ages activities will both relax your athletes and teach them how to visualize a desired outcome, as well create thoughtful post-season reflections.

**TrueSport Certificate (PDF)**
Lesson Certificate: Celebrate your group’s completion of the TrueSport Preparation & Recovery lesson with this special certificate.
In order to reinforce the lesson and put TrueSport into action, do the following Chalk Talk with your athletes.

“Success is not a matter of just wanting to win. It’s a matter of preparing to win, which is much more important.” —Mike Krzyzewski, Hall of Fame Basketball Coach

Keeping that quote in mind, have a discussion about pre-game preparation using these questions:

1. How do you prepare yourself before competition?
2. Why do you think a pre-game routine is important to success?
3. What are some signs that a team has good chemistry?
4. What do you think is more responsible for success: the will to win or proper preparation?
5. Can a pre-game preparation mentality be useful in other areas of your life besides athletics?
In order to reinforce the lesson and put TrueSport into action, do the following Chalk Talk with your athletes.

Instructions

Start a discussion about sleeping and sleep habits, keeping in mind the points on the Sleep Hygiene page in the lesson companion document.

1. On average, how many hours of sleep do you get a night?

2. Do you feel like that is enough? Why or why not?

3. If not, how could you find a way to get more sleep on a nightly basis?

4. Do you have a screen (like a television, phone, or computer) in your bedroom? Do you think it aids or distracts your sleep?

5. How do you think your sleep affects your performance in school? In your sport?
Relax & Visualize Activity: Middle School

Have your athletes sit or lie down comfortably on the floor. Take 5-10 minutes to go through this progressive muscle relaxation, reading it aloud in a calm voice:

Become aware of your breathing, and notice how your abdomen rises and falls with each breath.

Now take a long, slow, deep breath in through your nose, all the way down into your stomach. Hold the breath for just a moment, and then exhale through your mouth. Allow your breath to carry away all stress and tension as the air floods out of your lungs.

Take another slow breath in through your nose. Fill your lungs completely. Hold it for a moment...and release the breath through your mouth. Empty your lungs completely with your out-breath.

Take a third deep breath in. Hold it for a moment, and then let it go.

Feel that your body has already undergone a change. The tension in your body has begun to loosen and subside.

Now let your breathing rhythm return to normal.

During this relaxation I will ask you to tense various muscles throughout your body. Please do this without straining. Just contract each muscle firmly but gently as you breathe in. If you feel uncomfortable at any time, you can simply relax and breathe normally.

Bring your awareness to your feet and toes. Breathe in deeply through your nose, and as you do, gradually curl your toes down and tense the muscles in the soles of your feet. Hold your breath for just a few seconds and then release the muscles in your feet as you breathe out. Feel the tension in your feet wash away as you exhale. Notice how different your feet feel when tensed and when they are relaxed.

Now give your attention to your shoulder muscles and the muscles in your neck. As you slowly draw in a nice deep breath, pull your shoulders up towards your ears and squeeze these muscles firmly. Now breathe out completely, and allow your contracted muscles to go loose and limp.

Feel the heaviness in your body now. Enjoy the feeling. Feel yourself becoming heavier and heavier. Feel yourself becoming more and more relaxed.

Now it’s time to let go of all the tension in your arms and hands. Let’s start with your upper arms.

As you breathe in, tighten the muscles in your upper arms. Hold that breath and that contraction for just a moment and breathe all the way out. You may feel a warm, burning sensation in your muscles when you tighten them. Feel how relaxing it is to release that tightness and to breathe away all tension.
Now bring your awareness to your forearms. As you breathe in, curl your hands inwards as though you are trying to touch the inside of your elbows with your fingertips. Now feel the tension subside as you relax and breathe out.

Now, take another breath in and tightly clench your fists. When you have finished breathing in, hold for just a few seconds, and then release. Notice any feelings of buzzing or throbbing. Your hands are becoming very soft and relaxed.

Take a couple of nice, long, slow breaths now, and just relax.

Now tighten the muscles in your face by squeezing your eyes shut and clenching your lips together. As you do, breathe in fully. Hold it...now breathe out and relax all your facial muscles. Feel your face softening.

Now bring your awareness to the muscles in your jaw. Take a deep breath in, and then open your mouth as wide as you can. Feel your jaw muscles stretching and tightening. Now exhale and allow your mouth to gently close.

Again, fill your lungs with air and then open your mouth wide. Now let your mouth relax and let your breath flood all the way out.

You are now completely relaxed from the tips of your toes to the top of your head.

**Suggested Questions:**

1. *Was this exercise difficult for you? Why or why not?*

2. *How can you use this technique to prepare yourself for a game or competition?*

3. *Do you think you'd have the same result if you simply focused on your breathing?*

4. *Can this technique be helpful in other areas of your life?*
**Visualize A Sport-Specific Scenario:**

**High School Activity**

Have your athletes sit or lie down comfortably on the floor. Take 5-10 minutes to go through this progressive muscle relaxation, reading it aloud in a calm voice:

1. Keeping your eyes closed, visualize yourself achieving success during competition.  
   (Success could relate to a specific skill, like swinging a bat or serving a volleyball, or implementing perfect form. It could also be a positive outcome, like scoring a penalty kick in soccer or coming from behind to win the team relay at a swim meet.)

2. Ask them to focus on as many senses as possible, such as smell, sound, and touch, while mentally performing a skill.  
   (Example: mentally place a basketball player at a free throw line for a game-winning shot; talk about the crowd noises, the smell of popcorn, the feel of the ball as they dribble, and their perfect form as they shoot.)

3. Have them pick one skill or outcome in the sport and practice it ten times, making sure it is a perfect performance without any errors.  
   (Encourage them to be inside their body, feeling the skills, and not on the outside, simply watching them. The former is more effective.)

**Suggested Questions:**

1. Was this exercise difficult for you? Why or why not?
2. Do you think it’s important to be relaxed before applying visual imagery? Why or why not?
3. What senses came up in your imagery?
4. Was it difficult to practice perfect imagery without flaws? Why or why not?
5. Were you able to be inside your body, performing the task, or on the outside watching? Which do you think is more effective?
6. Could you use visualization in other areas of your life?
Widening The Circle: Middle School Activity

The following activity is a good one to do after a season is winding down, and it's also very helpful for relieving some game-day pressure and reminding athletes that their performance/sport is just one aspect of their total person.

Give each of your athletes a piece of paper, and have them draw 10 circles of the same size on it. In each circle, have them write one or two words that describes something they like to do (such as specific hobbies or activities like sewing, reading, or hanging out with friends) or a role they play (such as a daughter, a brother). They can use one circle for the sport they are currently playing, and other circles for additional sports they play.

More circles can be drawn if need be. If they are unable to fill ten circles with activities and/or roles, they can use words that describe themselves.

Next have your athletes draw a big circle around all the other circles and explain that the big circle is the whole individual. Even though you have been focusing on one sport for an extended period of time, when the season is done, it’s time to take a break to focus on some of the things they may have been neglecting because of the demands of the season.

Suggested Follow-Up Questions:

1. What are some of the circles that make up your whole?

2. Do you feel like some of your other circles get compromised during your season? Why or why not?

3. Why is it important for your body to take a break after a season?

4. Why is it important for your mind to take a break after a season?
Make copies of the handout on the next page and distribute them to your athletes. Have them record their afternoon/evening activities for 3-7 days, then have them bring their schedules back to the group. Have a discussion using the following questions:

**Suggested Questions:**

1. On average, how many hours of sleep are you getting a night?

2. What time do you typically stop drinking caffeine? Ideally it should be at least six hours prior to bedtime.

3. When do you eat dinner? (Two-to-three hours before bed is best.)

4. What time do you turn off electronics and/or stop studying? (At least one hour before bedtime is a good goal.)

5. Do you have an established bedtime routine, or do you just hit the pillow as soon as your homework is done?

6. Does seeing your evening patterns written down give you a different perspective on your sleep habits?

7. Are there slices of time and/or activities you could cut down or eliminate to give you an earlier bedtime?
Truesport Afternoon/Evening Schedule

Do you have a hard time getting to bed at an acceptable hour most nights? For 3-7 days, write down what you do from 4 p.m. until your bedtime (use the back of this sheet or a piece of notebook paper if you need more room).

Be sure to include your bedtime routine and when you do it. Also, include the time you wake up and how you feel when you do.

DATE: ______________

4:00 _____________________________________________________________
4:30 _____________________________________________________________
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11:00 ____________________________________________________________
11:30 ____________________________________________________________
12:00 ____________________________________________________________

Wake-Up Time: _______________________________

Hours of Sleep Last Night: _______________________________

How I Feel: _______________________________
Congratulations! You have demonstrated that you know how to be a TrueSport Champion!

TrueSport, powered by the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (USADA), is a movement that seeks to ensure a positive youth sport experience for athletes like you. In learning how to prepare and recover from sport, you have gained skills to be a leader both on and off the field.