

## ***“Mental Concentration: a Key Factor to Peak Performance”***

**By: Mind to Muscle Sports Conditioning Centre**

It is commonly agreed that mental preparation and toughness in hockey is an integral part to the success of any athlete and team. However, the most neglected aspect of training has been mental training. Athletes spend numerous hours on the ice working on their skating, shooting, passing and other hockey specific skills such as power play, and breakouts. Yet, more often than not, little or no emphasis is put into this crucial aspect of sports performance.

The problem is we expect athletes to intuitively know how to concentrate. However, most athletes do not understand or have the skill of controlling their focus consistently. Hockey players are continuously asked to get focused, get mentally prepared, and get your head in the game and concentrate! These are well-intended commands, but they are abstract with no specific meaning or direction for most athletes. For one, what is concentration and focus? And two, how does one achieve concentration and maintain it consistently?

There are two fundamental components to concentration. The first component is the skill of keeping the conscious mind in the present. Athletes must discipline and train their minds to stay focused shift to shift. This does not happen automatically. A hockey player is faced with many distractions throughout a hockey game; the score, referee's call, coaches and parent's expectations, personal play, time left in the game and mistakes.

One way an athlete can maintain their conscious mind in the present is to preoccupy it with specific game strategies so that during each shift there is a purpose. Once a hockey player sets goals he/she commands the body what it wants it to do. Therefore, there is a constant determination shift to shift, which leads to positive results. If you are a goaltender you must stay focused shot to shot.

The second factor to absolute concentration is keeping the mind perfectly clear of any unproductive or distracting thoughts. This is a very difficult skill to master, which requires constant practice and reinforcement. Therefore, keeping the mind clear of any thoughts for any length of time takes a lot of discipline and training.

Therefore, a hockey player will only experience their individual peak performance consistently once they learn how to stay focused consistently. The success of any team is totally dependent on how well individual athletes get mentally focused for every shift of every period of every game.