

# Relaxation and Visualization

For the long distance runner  
Neal Blackburn  
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Columbia MO

Roger Bannister  
leading up to his  
sub 4:00 mile



- On May 6, 1954, Roger Bannister became the first person to run a sub-4 minute mile. Prior to this monumental event, the 4-minute mile barrier had developed such a mystique surrounding it that some considered it a physical impossibility. But the next month the barrier was again shattered by John Landy, and in the following few years broken by almost a dozen more runners. Now, there are almost 900 men who have run a sub-4 minute mile, including a former high school student and a 40+ year-old man.
- It's true that when Roger Bannister crossed the finish line, the sport was poised for this record to be broken. Over the past century, advancements in training technique, equipment and track surfaces have continuously whittled away at race times. But what led this one man to break the record when he did, when many others had tried and failed?
- Our beliefs determine how high we set our sights
- Roger Bannister believed he could run a sub-4 minute mile, and so aimed for this goal with all the direction and focus he could muster. After a disappointing finish in the 1952 Olympics, Bannister made an important decision: that he wanted to be the first man to run a mile under four minutes. challenges.)
- Ambitious beliefs lead to ambitious goals. Limiting beliefs lead to impotent goals. You will rarely accomplish more than what you set out to, and can't hit the target if you're not aiming for it. Positive thinking isn't enough, but it creates a mindset that allows the intersection of superior planning and execution. Bannister made the decision to pursue the 4-minute mile, he changed his training regimen, training more frequently and with harder intervals. He trained with the single-minded intention of beating this record.
- His performance on May 6, 1954 was not an accident of fate. It was the intersection of belief, motivation, planning, execution and a little bit of luck. accomplish something is the first step. With belief comes visualization, and with visualization comes planning, and with planning comes execution. And with a deep, soul-rocking belief in your ability to accomplish a goal comes the motivation and discipline to see through your plan even when the going gets tough.

# MORE THAN 3,000 POINTS NOW,

*Visualization*

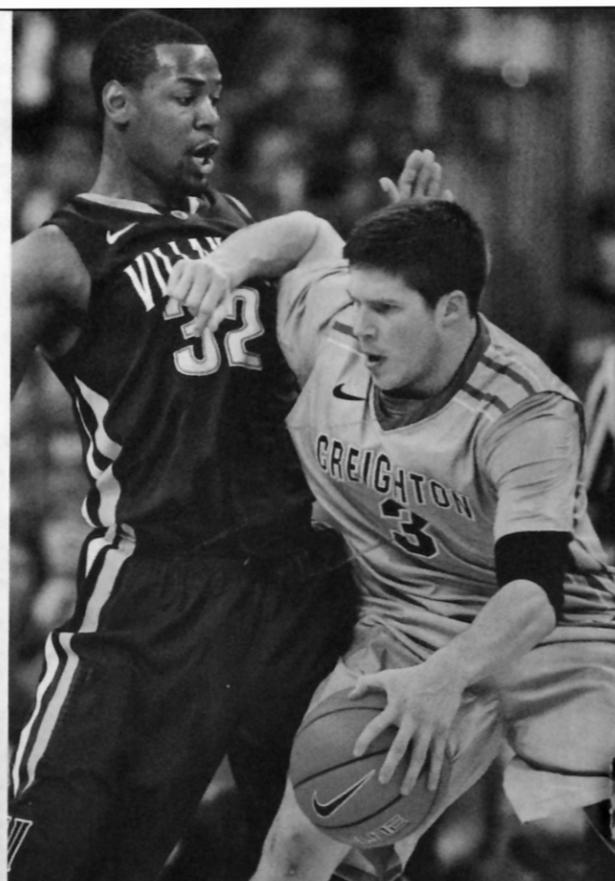
and in how many ways? McBuckets' bucket list is long and diversified. They've come on threes and post moves, on banked-in leaners and one-legged fadeaways, on hard curls and slipped screens. They've been 85.5% right-handed, 12.8% lefty, and just 1.7% of them have been dunks. They've come in Peoria, Springfield and Wichita for three seasons, and in Philly, Indy and New York City during this profile-boosting year in the Big East.

Almost all of Doug McDermott's points—including the career-high 45 he dropped against Providence last Saturday—have been scored in a state of posthypnotic calm. At the CenturyLink Center he enters this state before warmups, when the 6' 8" senior forward retreats to an empty hockey locker room with

Jack Stark. The Omaha-based psychologist worked with Nebraska's football dynasty in the 1990s, helps NASCAR drivers Jimmie Johnson and Dale Earnhardt Jr., and has become attached to the basketball program at Creighton, a Jesuit school, partly because he believes he's doing his Catholic duty but mostly because he loves being around Doug and his father, Greg, the coach of the Bluejays.

Stark has McDermott lie on a training table and talks him into a deep-relaxation phase. Stark counts backward from five to one. McDermott arrives at a beach. There, he removes the clutter from his mind—the anxiety of game day, the pressure of carrying an offense for a top 10 team, the desire to not let anyone down—and puts it in a box, on a raft, and pushes it into the blue water. The tide carries it away.

Hypnosis opens the mind to suggestion, so Stark begins re-filling McDermott's with positive past experiences, reminders of times when the points



**PUTTING ON A CLINIC** In two games against Villanova, McDermott had 62 points on just 30 shots.

came easy. Stark guides him through that day's game. He covers how McDermott will deal with defenses and make winning plays. McDermott is then brought back to full consciousness with these visuals in his head. This has been part of his pregame routine since Dec. 22, 2010, when he first tried it to help with his pregame focus. McDermott is too superstitious to switch away from something that worked.

Before McBuckets, this millennium's list of the best four-year scorers consisted of BYU's Jimmer Fredette, North Carolina's Tyler Hansbrough and Duke's J.J. Redick. McDermott has eclipsed all three of them in career points. The season he's having in the Big East, using

33.0% of Creighton's possessions at 1.23-points-per, trumps any usage-and-efficiency lines posted by any big-time scorer of the last decade (*chart, p. 35*). McDermott is the centerpiece of the most efficient offense since Wake Forest's Chris Paul-led 2004-05 team, at an adjusted 1.254 points per possession, according to kenpom.com. He's the only star to have been deemed by an opposing coach (in this case, Villanova's Jay Wright) to be the best shooter *and* best post player in the game.

Through Sunday only six players remained ahead of McDermott on the Division I career scoring list. At No. 1 and untouchable is another coach's son, Pete Maravich, who amassed 3,667 points in three seasons at LSU from 1967 to '70, before the three-point line existed. If Creigh-

BY JIMMER FREDETTE

[http://www.youtube.com/  
watch?](http://www.youtube.com/watch?)

[v=iRb0hNCaDmE&sns=em](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRb0hNCaDmE&sns=em)

# What we do at Rock Bridge:

- Fridays before Saturday cross country meets
- Environment where it's quiet, big enough to hold our entire team (100 athletes), dark, and gives kids ability to lay on backs obstruction-free.
- Set the tone for the session with reminder of goals and accomplishments since last meet.

# Relaxation

- We begin with relaxation portion of the session.
- Begin with having athletes lay on backs, closing eyes, and having a dimmed atmosphere.

# Relaxation Commands

- Close your eyes and clear your mind of all of the week's activities, distractions, and stresses. Forget about the test you just took, your boyfriend or girlfriend's issues, tomorrow's race, etc...
- Place yourself in your ideal solitary environment. This might be the beach, basement, book nook on a rainy day, etc... Keep your mind present in this location.
- Take 2-4 deep breaths and focus on exhaling.

- At this point we begin the process of tensing and releasing various muscle groups in the body while maintaining a rhythmic breathing pattern through the tension and relaxation portion. Hold the tensing of the muscles for 5-7 seconds then have athletes gradually release the tensed muscles while calmly exhaling.
- Be direct in what you are saying and maintain a rather monotone speaking pattern.
- "The first thing I would like you to do is to tighten the muscles in your face by squeezing your facial muscles together with your eyes closed. Do that now please."

- "Relax." Remember to speak little blurbs and reminders during process.
- "Let's start on the right side of your body. Go ahead and contract your right biceps muscle, do that now please." Hold 5-7 seconds. "Relax. Remember to gradually exhale as you release the muscle tension."
- "Stay in your right arm, and tighten the forearm. Do that now please." Hold 5-7 seconds. "Relax. Remember at the peak of your tension to maintain your rhythmic breathing."
- "Moving into your right hand, make a fist. Do that now please. Relax."
- "Finally, in your right hand, tighten up each individual finger as if your were trying to palm a basketball. Do that now please. Relax."

- Issue same commands for left side of upper body. As you input a variety of blurbs into your commands, remind them of how good, light, and relaxed they are feeling: "Feel the tension leaving your body." "Your arms feel so light and relaxed."
- When finished with upper body proceed with lower body.
- Start on right side of body and begin with, "Contract your right quad muscle, do that now please." Again, hold 5-7 seconds, reminding them to reduce stress levels of muscle contraction with controlled relaxed breathing. "Relax."
- "Remaining in your right leg, tense your calf muscle, do that now please." Remind them that their legs are feeling light and fresh as you go through the process. "Relax."

- "Moving into your right foot, go ahead point your foot forward, do that now please." "Relax."
- "Finally, in your right foot, scrunch your toes together, do that now please." "Relax."
- Continue to interject valuable snippets of information related to your kids, your competition, etc...that can help them relate more personally to the relaxation process.
- "Moving to the left side of your body, begin by contracting your left quad muscle, do that now please. Make sure you get to the burn feel of the contraction, then release gradually, calmly maintaining your relaxed breathing." "Relax."

- "Move into your left calf. Go ahead and tighten your muscles, do that now please." "Relax."
- "Move into your left foot, pointing your foot out. Do that now please." "Relax."
- "Finally, scrunch your toes up, do that now please." "Relax."
- At this point, athletes should feel relaxed, some may be snoring, I typically tap them on the shoulder if they are disrupting someone else's concentration. Remind them to continue their relaxed breathing, especially if they begin to get anxious when we start the visualization process.

# Visualization

- At Rock Bridge, we believe that we need to be relaxed before we can visualize effectively.
- I ask athletes to adopt a certain visualization camera angle. Athletes can "watch themselves" as if on TV, from the video game first person Call of Duty lens, or their Goodyear Blimp perspective.
- When visualizing, you want to use and put into play, as many of the five senses as possible for stimulation effects: Smelling the fresh cut grass. Feeling the wet morning dew. Seeing the colors of competition jerseys, splits on watch, etc. Hearing teammates, coaches, parents, music. Tasting water, Gatorade, bagels.
- Always, always, always be POSITIVE.

# Visualization

- The reason visual imagery works lies in the fact that when you imagine yourself perform to perfection and doing precisely what you want, you are in turn physiologically creating neural patterns in your brain, just as if you had physically similar to small tracks engraved in the brain cells which can ultimately enable an athlete to perform physical feats by simply mentally practicing the move. Hence, mental imagery is intended to train our minds and create the neural patterns in our brain to teach our muscles to do exactly what we want them to do (Porter, 17).

# Visualization

- I typically set tone for upcoming meet by replaying general occurrences from previous meets, last year's meet there, expectations, etc...
- I speak to them about preparing their travel bag, breakfast, arrival at bus, bus ride, arrival at meet, weather forecast, warm-up, etc...essentially taking them to the starting line. (All of this reinforces what you say all the time, but allows them to really digest what you are saying in a focused environment)
- When getting them to the starting line, I focus on all senses again, including the nervousness of the situation, reinforcing the necessity to remain relaxed with their breathing and focus. I take them through the feel of being in their uniform and racing shoes.
- I take them through striders and accelerations.

# Visualization

- Next, I take athletes through the starter's gun, and the race beginning. I take them through their various race strategies, asking each individual to focus on their own race plan, as well as the topography of the course itself. I ask them to simulate, positively, the racing environment, inserting various cues, again, applying (reasonably) as many of the senses as you can.
- I ask athletes to begin to visualize their splits, places, etc...again, remaining positive.
- At a certain point during the visualization process, I want my voice to fade and their own concentration and focus to intensify.

# Visualization

- I ask athletes to take command their races and their visualization.
- After a minute or two of silence as they continue their visualization, I take a chosen song based on a variety of reasons and begin to fade it into the visualization experience. I remind athletes to control their focus and especially their breathing as the music tends to accelerate their heart-rates.

# Visualization

- The music, in a sense, is meant to serve as a mantra over the duration of their actual races the next day. Many of the athletes actually add the song to their own play list and rehearse on their own leading to the racing moment.
- I fade music out as song begins to end, issue final instructions, such as the workout and expectations for the day's practice, and allow them to immediately break into their training groups starting their practice. At that point, it is my role to keep them relaxed, so I use humor from that point to keep tension and stress at a minimum.

# Visualization

- Cues during visualization specific to Rock Bridge: crest hills (20 steps), peel corner, Flying V, pack run, fly downs, pack up, change cadence, be courageous, whatever you might command during a race, command during visualization. Create the blue print for racing success before the race itself.
- I believe this process is all about preparation. We physically prepare day in and day out, we must devote some time to the mental component that oftentimes gets overlooked. In the end, I want my athletes to believe and feel they are more prepared than their opponent. With that increased level of confidence, I believe it's an intangible that may prove effective when it matters most.
- Thinking on past successes whether in practice or meets is significant. I call this our "notecard system".

# Visualization

- After reading through numerous studies, visual imagery seems somewhat promising and beneficial. Although it is not as beneficial as physical training, visual imagery fairs better than no practice at all. Hence, a program with physical training training seems to be the best method. Virtually all of the studies show that mental training improves motor skills. More recently a lot of studies go even further and prove that visual imagery can improve various skills related to sports in actual field contexts. Visual imagery seems to be beneficial to anyone who wants to improve at their sport. Whether you are a recreational athlete or a professional does not matter. The benefits of mental imagery have proved successful at any level. Not only can mental imagery improve specific motor skills but it also seems to enhance motivation, mental toughness and confidence, all which will help elevate your level of play.

# Music Examples

- "We are the Champions". Queen
- "The Champ". Nelly
- "The Scientist". Coldplay
- "Chariot". Gavin DeGraw
- "I Hope You Dance". LeAnn Womack
- "Hall of Fame". The Script
- "Beautiful Day". U2
- "The Show Goes On". Lupe Fiasco
- "Against All Odds". Phil Collins
- "Not Afraid". Eminem
- "Lose Yourself". Eminem
- "Right Now." Van Halen
- "It's My Life". Bon Jovi
- "Revolution". The Beatles