

Talk Title: *Mental Performance Planning to Support the Mental Well-Being of Young Athletes*

Audience: Athletic Directors

Time: 9:55 a.m.

1. Title Slide

- Title: *Mental Performance Planning to Support the Mental Well-Being of Young Athletes*
- Name, credentials, HITE EQ affiliation
- Quick intro: Olympian → I/O Psychology → Sport Psych
- Framing: The role of mental skills in protecting athlete well-being and improving long-term development

2. What Athletes are Navigating

- Increased pressure at younger ages
 - Early specialization in sport
 - Year-round training with fewer breaks for recovery
 - Recruiting timelines moving earlier, shifting motivation and anxiety
- Public-facing performance culture
 - Athletes grow up “on display”
 - Rankings, social media, online coverage of results
 - Constant comparison to peers, even outside their own region or class
 - Pressure to curate an identity around sport
 - External validation reinforces outcome-based self-worth
- Limited development of emotional tools
 - Struggle with emotion regulation
 - Fewer natural opportunities to reflect, reset, or fail safely
 - Language around mindset or emotion often missing at team level
- Increased visibility of mental health—but uneven implementation of support
 - Awareness doesn’t always mean access
 - Relying on informal or coach-led mental support
 - Role boundaries between coach, counselor, and parent can blur
- Shifting athlete identity
 - Difficulty separating self from sport
 - “I am my performance” mindset
 - Disruption or injury can create full-blown identity crises

- Success can narrow identity further
 - High-performing athletes sometimes suppress emotion to maintain image
- Performance consistency becomes harder to sustain
 - Mental fatigue accumulates without recovery tools
 - Setbacks carry emotional weight beyond the competition context

3. What Mental Performance Really Is

- Mental skills ≠ therapy or crisis management
 - They are proactive, teachable skills
 - Embedded just like strength, recovery, or nutrition
- Key goal: help athletes execute under pressure while preserving long-term well-being
- Programs with basic mental skills infrastructure see stronger retention, coachability, and athlete recovery

4. Supporting Confidence and Self-Awareness

- Confidence develops through experience, feedback, and reinforcement over time
- Self-awareness allows athletes to notice, interpret, and adjust their own responses
- These skills are foundational for resilience and decision-making in competitive environments
- Many coaches already support this development—whether or not it's formally named
 - Examples of low-barrier mental skills in use:
 - Reflective moments after training (“What went well today?”)
 - Simple reset routines before competition (e.g., breathing, mantras)
 - Teaching athletes how to reframe frustration into learning
- When environments support these tools, they tend to show up more consistently across teams

5. Psychological Safety as a Prerequisite

- Definition: athletes can make mistakes, speak up, and show emotion without fear of retribution
- Lack of safety leads to performance suppression, athlete withdrawal, or compliance without growth
- Departmental impact points:
 - Language used in coach meetings

- Who gets highlighted and why
- What traits are tied to “grit” or “leadership”
- Psychological safety precedes resilience

6. Creating Access Points for Mental Performance

- Most programs don’t have daily access to a certified sport psychologist
 - Mental skill development can still occur
- Culture change
 - You set expectations that shape how coaches show up
- Ways to embed mental skill development into your framework:
 - Include “athlete development” or “mental skills integration” in coach evaluations
 - Encourage head coaches to set team-level focus areas (e.g., confidence, focus, reset routines)
 - Highlight what’s already happening
 - Share examples of teams using mental skills at banquets or newsletters
 - Showcase coaches modeling emotional intelligence or composure
 - Certified professionals are vital for deeper support
 - Referrals, team-wide programming, advanced assessments
- Mental skill culture becomes real when it’s expected and supported
- Build the bridge so athletes know where to walk and when to ask for more

7. Final Slide: Your Influence as AD

- Mental training is no longer optional
 - it’s essential for development and safety of your athletes
- What does it look like to empower your coaches
 - Lead with values
 - Build structure
 - Normalize mental performance as part of success