

Talk: Filling in the Gap in Mental Performance

Audience: Coaches (Mixed Sports)

Time: 1:00–1:50 p.m.

1. Title Slide

- Title: *Filling the Gap in Mental Performance*
- Name, credentials, HITE EQ affiliation
- Background: Olympian, I/O Psychology PhD, CMPC
- Framing: Athletes are changing. Sport environments are adapting. This talk highlights what shifts are happening and what tools are proving effective.

2. Shifts in Athlete Behavior and Communication

- Emotional reactivity is increasing
 - More visible frustration after mistakes
 - Difficulty regrouping when things don't go as planned
 - Strong responses to feedback especially in group settings
- Communication patterns are changing
 - Athletes may appear disengaged but are often overstimulated
 - Less verbal ownership of mistakes; more externalization
 - Tend to shut down when feedback feels personal, vague, or sarcastic
- Lower tolerance for discomfort (mental and physical)
 - “Hard” practices can trigger emotional fatigue, not just physical exhaustion
 - Less patience for repetition, waiting, or correction without context
- More openness around stress, fewer tools to manage it
 - Athletes may talk about anxiety, overthinking, or burnout
 - Coping strategies are inconsistent, untrained, or absent
- Coaches report challenges with:
 - Getting buy-in when there's no immediate success
 - Rebuilding confidence after poor performances
 - Maintaining focus across reps, practices, and long seasons

3. Technology and Social Media: Compounding Pressure

- Visibility is constant
 - Athletes track, post, compare

- Performative part of “performance” is emphasized more than the process behind the performance
- Social media creates a false sense of permanence
 - One bad game or missed PR feels like a defining moment
 - Algorithms reward extremes
- Mental strain builds through:
 - Continuous comparison
 - Over-identification with outcomes
 - Pressure to project confidence even when struggling

4. The Role of Coaches in Holistic Development

- Coaches shape training environments that impact how athletes think, feel, and recover
 - Structure, language, and modeling matter
- Mental skill development happens around the sport
 - Athletes often adopt mindset habits through routine, repetition, and reflection
- Environments that support holistic development often include:
 - Clear process goals, not just outcome goals
 - Normalized emotional recovery (bounce-back, reframing)
 - Language that reflects learning, growth, and composure

5. Practical Tools That Support Mental Skill Growth

- Self-talk
 - “Reset” phrases or anchoring language for regrouping
 - Internal narratives shaped by external cueing
- Focus regulation
 - Mini resets after drills or between reps
 - Focus on controllables vs. uncontrollables
- Breath control
 - Pre-performance calming tool
 - When practiced in training, becomes accessible in competition
- Reflection
 - Questions like “What did I learn today?” or “What did I respond well to?”
 - Helps separate emotion from evaluation
- Integration methods:

- Include 1–2 minutes of mental training in daily practice flow
- Use post-practice debriefs to reinforce awareness and adjustment
- Introduce one new mental skill per phase of season

6. Closing Frame: Closing the Gap

- Athletes today arrive with different needs and expectations
- Physical training has evolved—mental training often hasn't kept pace
- Mental performance doesn't need to be a separate curriculum
 - It can exist within how sport is already coached
- When tools like regulation, self-talk, and reflection are embedded in the season, athletes tend to show greater resilience, composure, and ownership over their performance