

GAME FACE

How To Psyche Up Before A Big Event

The second mental error athletes make is they don't psyche up before big events.

I once met a world class figure skater who actually retired because she vomited before every competition.

Most athletes do nothing. Others rely heavily on superstition. For example...

In tennis, you're not supposed to wear yellow and step on court lines.

In hockey, it's considered bad luck for sticks to lie crossed.

In golf, any ball with a number higher than 4 is said to be bad luck.

If your GAME FACE routine consists only of superstitions, you're in trouble.

Success at the highest levels of sport is as thin as a razor's edge.

It's not the best athlete who wins on game day.

It's the athlete who *performs the best* that wins.

Now I'm not saying you should abandon your favourite superstitions. If you *think* something works, it works....and even superstars have their rituals.

Michael Jordan always wore his blue North Carolina shorts under his Chicago Bulls uniform for good luck.

Baseball star Wade Boggs ate only chicken on game day. He used to draw a symbol that means "To Life" in the dirt before every at-bat.

But a common mistake your competitors make the day of the event is a) doing nothing or b) using superstition alone.

This is leaving your GAME FACE up to chance, and I do NOT recommend it.

In this module, you'll discover how to master intense pre-competition nerves (performance anxiety).

You'll do this by using a planned GAME FACE routine to psyche up before competing.

Remember, performance anxiety is different from choking fear. Choking fear is sparked by an underlying problem in your skills or strategy that is bothering you.

Pre-event nerves arrive unbidden from your unconscious mind because you're about to perform - and the pressure is on!

These nerves make you alert and they activate you. But while they may *be* good, they certainly don't *feel* good.

As you learn how to master intense nerves with style and grace, you'll perform better and enjoy your event a whole lot more.

The Dumbest Advice I Ever Got

The dumbest advice I ever got when I had intense performance anxiety was, "*Lisa, just be more positive.*"

This advice drove me crazy.

It drove me crazy because no one ever taught me HOW to be positive.

So I'd pace up and down in the arena, repeating positive affirmations. You know what I mean...that artificial, sterile self-talk that never sinks in...

"You're the best and you're going to kick butt today."

"They'd better watch out for me."

"I feel confident and ready!"

A 'fake 'it till you make it' approach.

Exhausting.

It's exhausting because it doesn't work when you're overwhelmed with nerves (it does work if you're not nervous though).

Later, when I was working with other athletes, I realized it didn't work for them either.

Look, if you could eliminate pre-event nerves just by saying one sentence to yourself, every athlete would shine under pressure.

Few do.

The trick is to turn your anxiety - your 'scared energy' - into excitement and confidence. You do this with your GAME FACE routine.

The GAME FACE Routine

The second ingredient of the Courage to Win in Sport formula is to bring out your GAME FACE using a specific routine.

GAME FACE is your alter ego. It's your Sasha Fierce. It's bringing out your sun energy - your force of will. It's your cocky, aggressive self.

At some point, virtually all superstar athletes develop a routine for getting their GAME FACE on, no matter how informal.

You start by admitting that your current GAME FACE can be improved. This moment was central to Nancy Kerrigan's success as an Olympic gold medalist in figure skating.

In 1993 Kerrigan was on fire at the World Championships - in fact she was in first place after the short program.

The problem was she had an ingrown toenail on her big toe and had it removed before her long program.

That was the day Kerrigan realized, *"I don't know how to compete."*

Specifically, Kerrigan didn't know how to handle the forty minutes of pain between her warm up and her long program. She recalls: *"If I could have kept my head together, I could have been Ok...but I skated last in the long program...What are you supposed to do during that time?"*

Fortunately for Kerrigan, she went on a mission to handle wait times between performances.

“In practice I’d pretend that I skated 4th...I had about 22 minutes, so I had to figure out what I needed to do. I realized if I sat and waited, my muscles got cold and I would get nervous. Sitting did not allow me to get my nervous energy out...I realized that the tightness in my legs was from nervous energy, so if I could really warm up, I could get rid of that feeling - so I would sprint for three or four laps down the hall.”⁵

The 4 Ingredients of GAME FACE

A GAME FACE routine is personal and highly individual. You’ll want to come up with the one that suits you best.

There are four ingredients I highly recommend you include. They are:

1. Emotional visualization (start three weeks before your event)
2. A physical warm up that activates you
3. Your RIGHT FOCUS goals
4. An affirmation to accept your nerves

To fire up your imagination, here are the intimate details of the GAME FACE routine I used to score the winning goals in three World Championships.

Lisa’s GAME FACE Routine

Before I started doing mental toughness training I didn’t have a routine at all.

I decided that for the World Championships, I wanted a GAME FACE routine that got me really psyched.

Terry Orlick’s books had taught me that changing major patterns before a big event would throw me off. So, I kept it simple.

I started visualizing three weeks before the Worlds.

Visualization is the technical term for mentally rehearsing success inside your mind.

Canadian Olympic swimmer Mark Tewksbury is famous for his visualization skills. When Mark was eight years old, he watched the 1976 Olympics on T.V.

He decided then and there that he wanted to go to the Olympics and win. He wasn't very good at sports, but he knew how to swim. He talked his parents into letting him join a swim club:

My first experience at the swim club was a shock. I had thought I would represent Canada at the next Olympics, four years from 1976. It never occurred to me that I would only be able to swim a couple of lengths when I started.

At first I clearly held onto my memories of the 1976 Olympics, but it didn't take long for them to fade. The reality of my situation made my long-term goal seem completely out of focus. Instead of always thinking about the Olympics I had to look at short-term goals.

It had never occurred to me that before I could be the best swimmer in the world I would have to be the best in my club, then the best in the city and so on.

More importantly, before I could be the best in the club I would have to see myself as being the best.

Intuitively I began seeing each race before I swam it. I tried to imagine positive results in my mind so that when I went in to a race I would be in control. Without knowing it, I was using what is now known as visualization.⁶

I love Michael Jordan's story too:

"I have used visualization techniques for as long as I can remember. I always visualized success. It wasn't until later I realized it's something people have to learn. I had been practicing the principles naturally my entire life.

I visualized how many points I was going to score, how I was going to score them, how I was going to play and break down my opponent. If I was playing a scorer like Reggie Miller, I would envision his tendencies, his favourite spots on the floor, how he liked to receive the ball. It's like I would watch this little game unfold in my mind.

Then I'd make decisions based on what I saw. Should I attack early and put him on his heels? I had to stop him as well as

score on him, so I'd devise a plan based on what I had visualized.

...It didn't always play out exactly how I saw it, but most of the time it did.”⁷

Visualization is not new. There are hundreds (if not thousands) of athletes who have used it to catapult themselves to the top.

The problem is that most athletes don't visualize. And even if they try, they do not properly harness its power.

To avoid these two traps, I recommend you do emotional visualization (E.V.). It's a special brand of visualization I developed from spontaneous trial and error.

Emotional visualization is the first element of your GAME FACE routine.

1. Emotional Visualization

When I started visualizing, I realized that just imagining myself executing a play was not enough.

I needed to see and feel myself do it with *emotion*.

In emotional visualization, you 'see' the performance you want and connect to the positive feelings it evokes in you.

Here's what I did.

I started practicing emotional visualization while falling asleep in bed at night.

At first I couldn't get any images at all. So I tried to remember anything good I did in my last practice. I'd remember my best shots, my best passes, and my best checks from that day.

Then I deliberately made myself think about the World Championships. I imagined being there and executing the very same moves.

At first my nerves were so great it was hard to stay with this exercise. Often the image would break up right away, or I'd get distracted.

After several days I noticed it was getting easier. I started being able to imagine myself checking, scoring, and passing at the actual event - from the inside, as though I was dreaming.

Once I was comfortable visualizing in bed at night, I was ready to visualize at the arena before games.

That's when I created a new physical warm up routine featuring my emotional visualization.

Before each game I went for a jog around the arena alone. Listening to special music, I visualized myself scoring goals and playing perfect defence.

I loved Olympic diving champion Sylvie Bernier's GAME FACE routine so, like Sylvie, I also listened to the soundtrack of the movie Flashdance. The song Flashdance has a lyric that says, "*Pictures come alive.*"

And that's what I wanted to do at the World Championships: make my pictures come alive.

I also listened to the song 'Maniac' a lot because it had a fast beat and really energized me.

My GAME FACE emotional visualization - alone before each game - became a sacred ritual to me.

It was my time to go inside and connect with my true genius at ringette. I'd get goose bumps just visualizing my secret dreams.

Through this process I learned to **transform performance anxiety into excitement.**

Secret Keys to Emotional Visualization

Most athletes visualize without emotion. They violently resist this.

If you want to go from nervous to confident before a big event, *you need to have the courage to bring your nerves into your visualization.*

Otherwise, you're just doing it intellectually and you won't be emotionally prepared to compete.

Why was I different? Why was I able to bring my emotions into my visualization?

I think it's because I didn't get upset if fear, anxiety, or doubt crept into my mind. I instinctively knew that these feelings were a natural part of competing. I allowed them to be there and just kept visualizing anyway. Over time, my excitement outstripped my nerves.

I never worried that I was making myself "worse" in some way just because I was getting nervous. I knew that if there was a problem with my skills or strategy, I'd resolve it in practice.

Later, when I was working with athletes, I discovered that virtually all of them gave up on visualization too soon.

If their images broke up, they'd get frustrated and stop. If they got anxious, they'd stop. If they visualized a mistake, they'd panic and stop.

I gently worked through these issues in my visualization, and it paid off.

The moral of the story?

It's easy to make breakthroughs if you are prepared for the mental roadblocks I just explained. If you give emotional visualization a proper chance, you will transform your pre-event jitters into confidence and excitement.

To help you, I've recorded a special audio session. It will lead you through your emotional visualization. This MP3 file is on your Courage to Win in Sport download page. If you only ordered the Ebook version of this program, this audio file is not included.

Courage to Win Exercise

This exercise has two parts. First, listen to the audio I recorded for you. I recommend you listen to it every day starting three weeks prior to your next big event.

After you listen to the audio for the first time, answer the questions below.

Please write a few lines on what you experienced during this exercise. What happened to you? Were you able to recall a situation? What feelings did you have? If you couldn't summon any feelings, describe what happened to you emotionally. Feel free to describe your thoughts; however, please make sure that you also describe the emotions you had during this exercise. If you were not able to access any emotions, please record exactly what you did feel. Describe what did happen.

There are several things that may have happened to you during this exercise. Do not be concerned if you felt distracted, numb, or even negatively at any point during it. Merely record your experience.

As you continue to visualize success *with emotion*, you will gain more and more access to your confidence. **Listen to this audio daily, and watch your ability to access confidence before big events grow.**

When To Do Emotional Visualization

Start doing your emotional visualization at least three weeks before every big event.

If you're new to E.V., try it right after practice or training.

As you get momentum, I strongly recommend visualizing before you fall asleep at night...even five minutes is great.

On site, some athletes prefer to visualize immediately before competing. Other athletes visualize as much as an hour before their event. Some only do it the night before and don't use it in their GAME FACE routine at all. Try all three and see what works best for you.

2. Commit To Your RIGHT FOCUS

The second ingredient of your GAME FACE routine is your physical warm up.

Your physical warm up will be unique to your sport. How long or intense it is depends on how much activation your sport requires. A defensive tackle in football will need a more intense physical warm up than a billiards player.

I highly recommend you experiment with your personal warm up. Early on, I did not do this and I think it cost me some wins...let me explain...

In the beginning I went for a light ten minute jog around the arena.

But the older I got, the more I found that a light jog just wasn't cutting it. We have to skate at top speed after only a two minute on ice warm up. As I aged, I just couldn't come out flying anymore.

I added ten minutes of sprints to my physical warm up, even though I really didn't want to. I wasn't used to working so hard before a game! But these changes in my GAME FACE had a huge payoff. I only wish I had figured it out earlier.

Sometimes the smallest adjustments can give you a major edge. To quote Tom Peters, "*God is in the details.*"

3. Commit To Your RIGHT FOCUS

The third ingredient of your GAME FACE routine is to deeply commit to your RIGHT FOCUS goals.

Remember, the biggest reason we get anxious is because we cannot control three outcomes: performing well, feeling confident, and winning.

If we could control them, we'd always do all three.

Since we can't control them, we need to bring a supreme commitment to our RIGHT FOCUS goals. They are the quickest path to all three outcomes.

The key is to genuinely care about your RIGHT FOCUS - not just give it lip service.

Here are three examples of athletes who learned how to care about their RIGHT FOCUS.

Jim Furyk, US Open Champion

Jim Furyk, US Open Golf Champion, took awhile to buy into his RIGHT FOCUS.

For years Furyk used to slice the ball.

His Dad wanted Furyk to improve his alignment by laying his club down parallel to his target before swinging.

This would help Furyk keep his shoulders parallel and aligned to the target.

But Furyk was stubborn and refused. He just kept hitting the ball, trying to nail a straight shot.

Finally Furyk got fed up with being inconsistent. He started carrying rulers around in his bag, putting them down parallel to his target line every time.

This RIGHT FOCUS meant that Furyk practiced his alignment on every swing. Now he's a consistent ball striker and his confidence is consistent too.

I can relate to Jim's struggle to actually care about his RIGHT FOCUS.

Back when I started my GAME FACE routine, I didn't really understand the concept of RIGHT FOCUS. All I knew was that obsessing about goal-scoring was killing my game.

So I made a firm, unequivocal promise to myself that during the World Championships, I would NOT think about whether I was going to score.

Instead I set a simple goal: "*I want to do good things all over the ice.*" If this resulted in goals, that was fine, but I was not going to obsess.

I repeated this RIGHT FOCUS to myself all through my GAME FACE routine.

Committing deep in my heart to this RIGHT FOCUS goal worked extremely well for me.

During each game, I didn't think about whether or not I would score. In the final game, where this was most important, I managed to keep my RIGHT FOCUS of "*doing good things all over the ice.*" It really built my confidence because I noticed all my contributions, not just goals.

When I scored the winner with 1:25 left on the clock, I knew it was because I had deeply committed to my RIGHT FOCUS.

Courage to Win Exercise

In the space below, write down *how* your RIGHT FOCUS goals are going to help you win. Then write down *when* you will remind yourself of these goals during your GAME FACE routine.

4. An Affirmation To Calm Your Nerves

The final ingredient in GAME FACE is an affirmation to calm your frazzled nerves.

Sometimes your event is so important you are just overwhelmed with performance anxiety. This can happen even when there is nothing wrong; you simply have a strong case of the jitters.

In these situations, the easiest way to reduce performance anxiety is to *accept* your nerves.

Nerves, when not resisted, tend to dissolve. Why? Because your anxiety is a natural energetic response - your body is asking you to be alert and activated.

If you accept this reaction without resistance, your body knows you have 'heard' the request and your nerves will naturally subside.

The easiest way to accept your nerves is to create an affirmation - a positive thought - that will convince you to stop resisting them. I used this strategy with amazing success in 2001:

We were playing our arch-rivals for the Provincial title. They had been winning since 1999, and it was as close as any sporting event could be.

I had been cut from the National team the previous summer, which led me to doubt my ability for a few months. I decided to come back the following season and extract some revenge.

I was nervous. At 34 years old, I was the veteran on the team—a player my teammates might look to for some courage.

My nerves surprised me a little. They were as strong as I could remember in 28 years of competing. I was having trouble just swallowing normally.

I decided I needed a short-term strategy to manage the butterflies. I knew fighting my fear would never work, so I quietly said to myself, "Lisa, it's OK to be afraid."

Skating on to the ice, I said to myself, "Lisa it's OK to be afraid."

In between whistles, I said to myself, "Lisa, it's OK to be afraid."

Every time I said this, I relaxed more. I scored a goal on the first shift, and the rest is history. My team went on to win the Nationals.

When my name was called to receive the first team all-star award, my coach leaned over and whispered in my ear, "No one deserves this more."

I guess it is OK to be afraid.

Courage to Win Exercise

Pick a situation that could occur in your event. Develop an affirmation about it that begins with, "It's OK". Here are some examples:

It's OK to feel powerless.

It's OK to miss shots, make strategy errors, be clumsy, etc.

It's OK to be anxious.

It's OK to be frustrated.

Record your affirmation below:

Repeat this affirmation to yourself as often as necessary in your GAME FACE routine to ease your performance anxiety. Remember that you are not saying that you *approve* of this situation or feeling. You can be as upset about it as you wish. You are just accepting your anxiety because it is part of you.

If the term “OK” bothers you because it suggests approval, use the word “acknowledge”. For example, you could say, “*I acknowledge that I am nervous.*” Breathe and say it with as much conviction as possible.

This strategy works because you’re not trying to manipulate yourself into being emotionally perfect. You’re just trying to accept yourself.

If you could control your nerves, you would...since you can’t, you need to accept them so you can move forward and focus in the NOW. Remember, the event is the focus...not your feelings.

Courage to Win Exercise

To re-cap, here are the four ingredients of a basic GAME FACE routine:

1. Emotional visualization (start three weeks before your event)
2. A physical warm up that activates you
3. Your RIGHT FOCUS goals
4. An affirmation to accept your nerves

In the space below, describe your personal GAME FACE ingredients:

1. Emotional visualization (start three weeks before your event)

2. A physical warm up that activates you

3. Your RIGHT FOCUS goals

4. An affirmation to calm your nerves

Final Thoughts

The second mental error most athletes make is to neglect their psyche up before big events.

Most athletes don't have an excellent GAME FACE routine. Either they do nothing or they revert to superstition.

Unlike your opponents, you are going to develop a stellar GAME FACE routine that is unique to you. Using this routine, you will learn how to transform nerves into excitement and perform your very best when it counts.