

Preparation for Competitions

After all of your hard work during the week(s) leading up to that big meet, it all comes down to whether or not you “show up” on the day of a meet. When I say “show up” I am referring to how well you perform once the spotlight is on you. Your performance on meet/competition day is determined by several factors:

1. Your training up to the point of competition (throwing, lifting, etc.)
2. What you did the day and night before the competition
3. What you did the morning of the competition
4. What you did the hours and minutes before your first throw in the meet
5. Psychological concepts

Considering that your training is probably up to par, I will address items #2-5 here. I do not consider myself to be a sports psychologist or certified expert in the psychology of preparing for a meet. However, I have coached enough athletes, and have been in enough big meets, to know what it takes to get ready for one. Use this information strictly as a guide to help you assess how you prepare for that big meet.

What did you do the day and night before the competition?

The day before a competition you should not perform any heavy lifting, hard running, or hard throwing. I would think that is obvious. There are a few things I tell my athletes to try to accomplish the day/night before our meets:

1. Pack your bag(s) with all the equipment you will need the next day. Also, pack towels, rain gear, extra shoes and socks, shirts, etc. Bottle water ahead of time and refrigerate (if not purchasing bottled water).
2. Check your video camera and tapes, if you decide to bring one to the meet.
3. Eat a dinner high in carbs like pasta. Do not eat after 9PM and do not stay up late.
4. Try to get at least 6 hours of sleep.
5. Watch some film of good/great throwers (professionals) in your event several hours before bedtime. Many psychologists believe that you dream about, whether nightmares or pleasant dreams, the last things you see within the hour before you go to bed.
6. Get directions to the meet if necessary.
7. Work on your footwork in whatever event(s) you will be competing in on the next day.
8. Jog, bike, stretch, but do not play basketball. I've seen too many athletes turn an ankle or twist a knee the day before a meet while playing hoops (including me).
9. Prepare yourself and your equipment the night before so you aren't stressed about it the next morning. Put it in the car or by the front door so it is ready for the morning. You will always get that feeling on the way to the meet like you are forgetting something...so do it the night before and don't forget anything. You don't want anything to throw you off your routine.

What to do the morning of competition?

1. Eat a good, healthy breakfast such as pancakes and bananas. Do not eat any foods that you know will upset your stomach such as milk, certain juices, coffee, etc. You will probably have enough “butterflies” in your stomach to worry about.
2. Mentally rehearse both your warm-ups and competition throws. Sit and mentally picture your warm-ups and competition throws. How do you react before and after the throws? Which way do you enter/exit the ring? Etc.
3. Give yourself plenty of time to get to the meet. Do not leave the last minute.
4. Once at the meet and it is under way, figure out how much time the officials are giving between flights, for warm-ups, etc. Decide when you will begin warming up.
5. If it is hot out, get out of the sun...find shade.
6. Check with the officials (or have your coach check) to make sure you are entered/seeded correctly and/or checked in. You don't want to get there and wait around only to find out that you were never entered anyway.

What to do the hour/minutes before your first throw?

1. Avoid your competitors...there is plenty of time at the end of the meet for chit-chat.
2. Establish a proper warm-up schedule based on the amount of time you have between flights, etc. It is hard to give you a set time frame for when you should begin to stretch, jog, take throws, etc. (and this will vary according to each athlete). Usually I tell my athletes to start to break a sweat at least 2 flights before they actually begin to take warm-up throws with their flight. This is usually ½ hour before they throw, in most of our meets.
3. Sit and mentally picture your warm-ups and competition throws. How do you react before and after the throws? Which way do you enter/exit the ring? Etc.
4. Tape your wrist, lay out your towels, chalk, etc where you have ready or immediate access to them.
5. DO NOT OUT THROW YOURSELF IN WARM-UPS. Do you know how many times one of my athletes has come up to me during warm-ups to tell me that they just threw 45' or 50' (HS shot as an example). Or he just hit 150' in disc...etc. Who cares...do it for real in the competition, not during warm-ups. Stop trying to impress your competitors, let them warm-up hard.

Psychological Concepts of Competing

1. Have confidence in yourself.
2. During the week set realistic and attainable goals (short and long term) and constantly adjust them as necessary.
3. Be aggressive.
4. Don't hold back on your throws.
5. Get a good measure early in the meet to set the tone for the other athletes.
6. If you foul on your first throw, block it out immediately and mentally prepare for the next throws.
7. Use visual imagery as you drive to the meet and warm-up.

8. Avoid your competitors as you get closer to throwing for real Make friends after you win gold! Guaranteed they will only “trash talk” and try to psych you out with their inflated stories about throwing far in training.
9. Control your emotions...putting yourself in a fit of rage after a bad throw (or a throw that is not what you wanted) only takes mental and physical energy away from your goal for the day...to throw far!
10. Arrive at your meet like you want to be there! Don't foul on throws that you think aren't far (one of my biggest pet-peeves).
11. Competition should be a reward for your hard work and training. Because you work hard you were granted three chances to have that work pay off. If you have been working extremely hard, you will be given three more chances to reap the benefits of hard work.

Conclusion

Now of course these goals or guidelines will be easier for some and more difficult for others to apply, or even attempt. High school athletes have different training schedules and responsibilities when compared to collegians and professionals, and visa versa. They also have different abilities maturing patterns, and the like. It doesn't mean that you shouldn't at least try some of these suggestions in the upcoming weeks. Lance Deal went through years of frustrations and “turmoil” in his training and competing before he went to see a sports psychologist. We don't all need a sports psychologist, but we could all probably use a little help in preparing for competitions and changing some of our “habits”. It takes time and experience, but the rewards of a new PR at every meet outweigh the drawbacks of preparing for competitions.

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