



The IQ

PREMIERE ISSUE

UP YOUR MENTAL GAME

BETTER
FOCUS,
RESILIENCE,
RESULTS



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“It’s important to identify what confidence means to you so that you can connect to it and really believe and feel that it’s possible.”

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KEEP YOUR HEAD IN THE GAME

It's a phrase that coaches often say, for good reason. To succeed as an athlete, it takes more than just talent and physical prowess.

Mental performance skills — including the ability to concentrate, handle

pressure, and be resilient in the face of adversity — are just as important.

“Mental performance training is all about providing student-athletes with skills and resources that enable them to be in control of the psychological demands of performance,” says Dr. Lindsey Hamilton, Head of Mental Performance at IMG Academy.

Mental performance training can help student-athletes reach their full potential — on and off the field.

81% of parents believe that youth sports teach dedication and discipline.¹

81%

Research shows that it can pay off. A study by sport psychologists at the University of North Carolina Greensboro and Michigan State University revealed that Olympic champions were more committed and focused, and engaged in more extensive mental preparation, than athletes who were less successful.² When sport psychologists in Canada studied Olympic and world champions, they found that these athletes used mental

performance training techniques both to prepare for competition and to remain focused during high-level events.³

And the benefits of mental fortitude extend beyond sports education, especially now. In recent years, the number of adolescents reporting mental health issues has increased dramatically. A 2021 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study revealed that more than 4 in 10 students felt persistently sad or hopeless, and nearly





one-third experienced poor mental health.⁴

“The visibility of mental health has definitely brought a lens to our work and helped to prioritize it,” Hamilton says. “Today, people are much more aware of the need for coping mechanisms that can help them navigate life.”

“Our purpose is to educate and empower student-athletes to win their future, preparing them for college and for life.”

— BRENT RICHARD,
PRESIDENT OF
IMG ACADEMY

Mental performance coaching is about much more than winning a game, reaching a personal best, or earning a gold medal at the Olympics, says Dr. Duncan Simpson, Director of Personal Development at IMG Academy.

“Our intention is never just to make someone a better athlete. What we’re really focused on is helping them manage their emotions and become more well-rounded, more self-confident, and fully develop as a person,” Simpson says.

“Ultimately, it’s about setting young people up with important life



PRO POINTER

Participating in youth sports has been shown to lower rates of anxiety, stress, and depression and raise self-esteem in adolescents.

skills and tools they can use beyond college and for the rest of their lives,” he says.

In this guide, you and your student-athlete can learn more about the specifics of mental performance training, hear from IMG Academy alumni about how they’ve used these techniques both on and off the field, and find actionable tools to start implementing mental performance techniques immediately.

“Student-athletes deserve to be armed

with the tools they need to be in control of how they mentally approach the game, and how they approach life in general,” Hamilton says. “They’re going to face adversity and challenges, but if we can provide them with the resources to navigate those challenges, we’re developing them and serving them in the way that we should.” ■

GET ACCESS

Enhance your mental performance wherever you are through [IMG Academy+](#).

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THE 5 PILLARS OF MENTAL PERFORMANCE



Sport is more than physical. Performance is also a mental game. Learning these 5 essential skills can serve you well in all walks of life.

COMMITMENT

WHAT IT IS

Your motivation. Your goal. This is the drive that propels you to try, to practice, to keep going, and to excel. Commitment is the energy that fuels you, and allows you to never give up.

HOW IT'S DONE

“Our student-athletes have BIG goals: to play at a big college or be a professional athlete. These can be abstract, overwhelming, and feel discouragingly out of reach,” says Dr. Lindsey Hamilton, Head of Mental Performance at IMG Academy. “The real magic happens in the daily commitment, taking the granular steps toward getting you closer to where you want to be.

1

We call these smaller goals ‘process goals.’ What can you strive for right now that will ultimately get you closer to your big goal? With each step, you *will* get there.”

THOUGHT STARTER

What is your Why?
How will you go about achieving your goals?





CONFIDENCE

WHAT IT IS

Belief in yourself, your abilities, and your strengths. You have prepared and practiced for this. You *know* you can succeed.

HOW IT'S DONE

“It’s important to identify what confidence means

to you so that you can connect to it and really believe and feel that it’s possible,” Hamilton says. “Muhammad Ali said he was ‘the greatest of all time’ before he actually *was* the greatest — but he *felt* deep in his heart that he really could achieve it, and that’s the most important part. Keep in mind that confidence isn’t just on the field. It takes confidence to walk down the halls at school and say hi to someone you don’t know, or to speak in front of people.”

THOUGHT STARTER

What does your most confident self look like?

PRO POINTER

When you’re struggling with self-confidence, write down all of the small great moments you’ve had up until that moment.

— *Diamyn Hall*,
Leadership
Coach at
IMG Academy



FOCUS

3

WHAT IT IS

The ability to concentrate 100% on what is in your control at the present moment.

Blocking out all the unnecessary distractions, noise, and chatter, including negative thoughts. Focus on what you can control, on processes, the present, the positive, and staying composed.

HOW IT'S DONE

"It's often distractions that hold us back, especially under pressure," Hamilton says. "A common tool we use at IMG Academy is the acronym WIN: What's Important Now? In the middle of a basketball

game, when a player has just missed three shots in a row and is passing off shots they should be taking, that's when he or she needs to ask: What's Important Now? Guide your attention to just *one* action you can take at this moment."

THOUGHT STARTER

Can you lock in when it matters most?





RESILIENCE

WHAT IT IS

The ability to bounce back from a disappointment, and learn from the experience.

The mental fortitude you need in order to withstand pressure before, during, and after a stressful challenge. It's *how* you choose to react, not the events themselves, that changes your mindset, and the outcome.

HOW IT'S DONE

"I worked with a student-athlete who suffered a severe knee injury that sidelined her for the soccer season," says Hamilton. "In the middle of her rehabilitation, she was in a bike accident — another massive setback. She rehabbed again, and two years later she was back on the field and scored a winning goal. It was straight out of a movie! She went off to college at a Division I school and still uses the mental performance tools of Resilience that she learned at IMG Academy in her life moving forward."

THOUGHT STARTER

How do you deal with a setback, or a high-stress moment?

82%

82% of the most resilient Americans believe mental health is as important as physical health.⁵

4

HANDLING PRESSURE

LEARN MORE

See how [mental performance training](#) can enhance your game in sport and life.

WHAT IT IS

Using rational thinking and mental flexibility when faced with a challenge.

Stress is simply another opponent you can meet (and beat) proactively with preparation, training, and practice.

HOW IT'S DONE

2023 IMG Academy salutatorian and current Princeton student-athlete Flora Zhang learned actionable tools from her mental performance coaches that she still uses every day to help her perform under pressure: "Dedication and practice is the starting point."

5

Performance is not magic. You have to put in the work and do everything you can to be confident with your game."

THOUGHT STARTER

How do you cope with stress when it counts? ■

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TEXTING
WITH

DIAMYN HALL

IMG Academy
Leadership Coach

A former DI baseball player with a degree in psychology, Diamyn Hall, one of IMG Academy's leadership coaches, knows whereof he speaks. We texted with Hall for his tips, tricks, and top advice.

What does a leadership mindset mean, and how does it help performance?

A leadership mindset starts with understanding that leadership is influence — nothing more, nothing less. Before you can lead others, you need to be aware of the self.

PRO POINTER

People tend to mimic the emotions of those around them. Remind yourself of that and hold yourself accountable for what your energy is like no matter what.

— Diamyn Hall

TEXTING
WITH

As a former DI baseball player and team captain, what leadership advice resonates with you?

People forget your stats but remember who you were as a person.

You talk a lot about empathy. What's the best way to cultivate it?

Put yourself in their shoes first. We need to treat other people with the same grace we treat ourselves.

What's your favorite piece of advice to give anyone wishing to improve their leadership skills?

We all rise together, but it starts with being willing to lift others while we climb.

Who is your personal leadership hero?

John C. Maxwell. His book "The 360 Degree Leader: Developing Your Influence from Anywhere in the Organization" was one of the best leadership books I've ever come across. It's about how to lead up, across, and down, or younger.

What are your go-to movies about leadership?

"Remember the Titans," "Invictus," and "The Pursuit of Happyness."

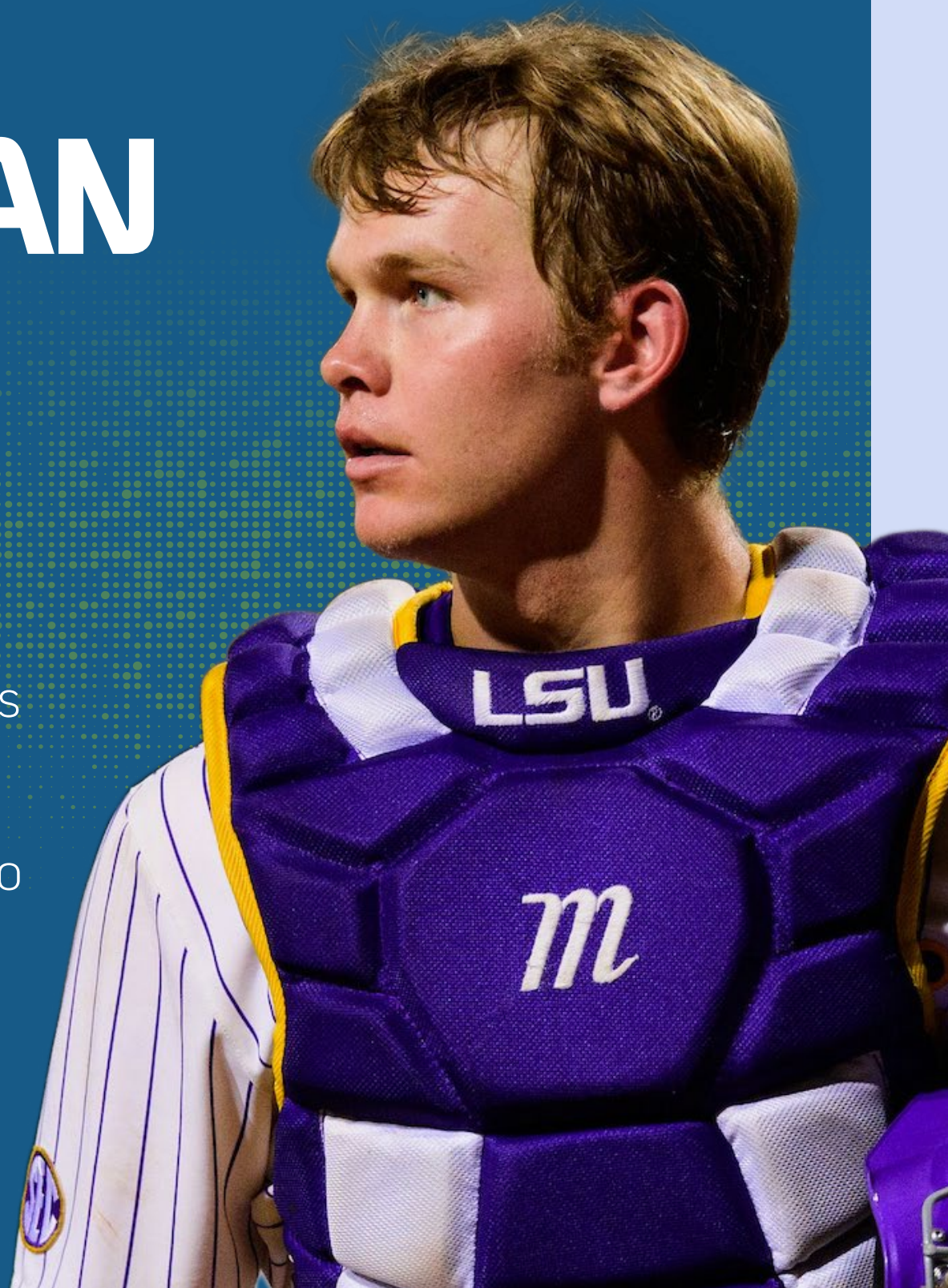


▶ WATCH THIS

Get a glimpse inside an [IMG Academy leadership session](#) with Diamyn Hall.

GUARDIAN OF THE GAME

IMG Academy alum and 2023 College World Series champion Brady Neal says mental performance training has been crucial to his success.





It was February 2023, opening day for the Louisiana State University Tigers, and freshman Brady Neal was behind the plate getting ready to catch the first pitch.

“I was definitely nervous playing in front of 13,000 people for the first time, but I knew I had to be 100% locked in and focused on the game,” says Neal, 18, a 2022 graduate of IMG Academy. “As the catcher, you’re the only player who can see all the other eight positions, and everyone is feeding off your body language. You have to be mentally strong.”

The Tallahassee, Florida, native says he learned many of the mental performance techniques he uses both on and off the field while he was a student-athlete at IMG Academy.

“Mental performance training was something I took seriously at IMG [Academy] because it’s a really big part of the game. I knew that it would help me get better and make it to the next level and the level after that.”

The techniques have helped him cope with the challenges of playing college baseball in the high-stakes Southeastern Conference (SEC) and not be derailed by setbacks.

“Mental performance training was something I took seriously at IMG [Academy] because it’s a really big part of the game.”

— BRADY NEAL

“It’s a tough league — you have pitchers who are throwing 100 [mph] every single pitch, and you’re gonna strike out sometimes,” Neal says. “But you can’t let that get to you. You have to walk up to your next at-bat like nothing ever happened.”

One strategy Neal uses when he’s at bat is something he learned from IMG Academy Leadership Coach Diamyn Hall: “If I swing at a bad pitch in the dirt, I find something in the stadium to focus on for a second, like a sign on the scoreboard, and it’s kind of like a reset button. I just let it go, I don’t even worry about it. I just look

at that reset, take a deep breath, and I’m ready for the next pitch.”

When he’s in the catcher’s box, Neal says, he takes a quick look at the logo on his glove to remind himself to focus on that moment. “You can’t have a divided mind. If you’re trying to catch someone who’s throwing really hard and your mind is still on that strikeout you made from the last inning, it’s not going to go very well,” Neal says.

“It’s all about being mentally tough and having a sense of pride in everything you’re doing.”

— BRADY NEAL



BRADY'S Advice for College Athletes

1 Be Coachable
“When you go to college, things are going to be different, so be open-minded and open to doing things differently. If your teacher or academic adviser tells you to do something, then do it.”

2 Let Go of the Failures
“When you’re playing at the college level, you have to accept that you’re going to fail sometimes. Definitely go in there and try to win every pitch, but realize that you’re gonna punch out sometimes. If you do, then just let it go, move on, and focus on what comes next.”

3 Don’t Have a Divided Mind
“Playing a sport can be difficult, especially when you’re still a young athlete, and you can’t have a split mind when you’re trying to do something really difficult. You have to focus on one thing.”



“There’s no *have to*,
there’s only *get to*.”

— BRADY NEAL

As a Division I athlete, Neal says the skills he mastered at IMG Academy have also helped him transition from high school to college and successfully juggle his athletic and academic responsibilities.

“College is different because you can get away with skipping class if you want to. There’s no one

there to make you go,” he says. “You just have to tell yourself, ‘Don’t skip workouts, get up and go to class, and be ready to sit in the front and participate instead of sleeping in the back.’ It’s all about being mentally tough and having a sense of pride in everything you’re doing.”

With his sights set on the big leagues, Neal says that feeling of pride is something he thinks about every day. “Our coaches often say, ‘There’s no *have to*, there’s only *get to*,’ and it’s very true. I get excited every time I walk on the field.” ■

CONFIDENCE

These 4 tips can help you cross the finish line confidently — on the court, course, and in life.



CONFRONT CHALLENGE

Deconstruct a negative thought. Break it down and then change your perspective. Ask questions like: **What's the worst that could happen? What's another way to view this situation?** Now, realize you have a choice about how you react. Be intentional. Be proactive. This is in your control.



STOP NEGATIVITY

Be aware when a negative thought enters your mind ("I'm going to blow this shot"). Then counter it in the moment by thinking, "STOP," and visualizing a stop sign. Be assertive but kind. The goal is to capture that negativity in the present moment and stop it. **Park any negative thoughts by writing them down immediately.** (Putting something in writing makes it tangible and real, as opposed to a passing thought you can't control.)



PRACTICE POSITIVE SELF-TALK

Replace negative thoughts with positive self-talk, and have some strong positive affirmations in your back pocket, such as **"I practiced for this," "I have the skills,"** and **"I'm great at this, and I can do it."**



BUILD YOURSELF UP

What does your most confident self look like? **Exhibit positive body language, even if you have to fake it till you make it.** When you show more confidence and act confident, the actual feelings of confidence will follow. So, stand up straight, shoulders back, and hold your head high.

FOLLOW US

Get more mental coaching tips on IMG Academy's [TikTok](#) and [Instagram](#) channels.

THE POWER OF POSITIVE SELF-TALK

Junior golf star, 2023 IMG Academy salutatorian and current Princeton student-athlete Flora Zhang credits this mental performance technique for her fortitude.

“The tool of positive self-talk is how I push my limits on the tough days.”

— FLORA ZHANG



A golfer, Flora Zhang, is captured in the middle of a golf swing on a green field. She is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt, dark pants, and a white cap. Her hair is tied back. The background is a blurred green landscape under a clear sky. A large, bright green circle with the number '8' inside is overlaid on the left side of the image.

8

Flora Zhang posted eight top 10 finishes over 18 World Amateur Golf Ranking-counted events between 2021 and 2023.

A sand trap on the golf course is a hazard, an obstacle, and a challenge. A mental trap is the same thing, except that it's in your mind. Both impact performance, and both are surmountable. For junior golfer and Princeton student-athlete Flora Zhang, her mental trap (like many of us) is talking negatively to herself.

"There are times when I'm nervous about short putts, and that's the time those negative thoughts come at me. Practicing the skill of positive self-talk has helped me perform under pressure and in difficult situations.

"In August 2020, I was able to capture my first AJGA Open win. On the last shot approaching a par-5 green, the ball was a little below my feet, which was something I'd been struggling with. Trying to get good contact with the ball from this position was a huge challenge for me, and in order to win this

tournament, I had to nail this shot. I calmed myself down by focusing on the process of hitting the shot instead of the consequence of what might happen. At that moment, I told myself: **'I know who I am. I know how hard I practice. Step up to it and execute the shot just like you would do on a practice day. You've got this.'**

"We're all pretty good at trying our best when everything's going our way, but I think what separates the good from the great is when things aren't perfect. That's when your ability to focus and lock in plays a huge role. Golf is 60% physical performance and 40% mental. The tool of positive self-talk is how I push my limits on the tough days." ■

▶ WATCH THIS

See the [IMG Academy video with Flora Zhang](#), "What Separates the Good from the Great?"

THOUGHT SHIFTERS

Effective strategies to help student-athletes counter negative self-talk.

The ability to counter negative self-talk with positive affirmations is a key component of resilience, and it's something that all athletes can be taught to do,

says IMG Academy's Head of Mental Performance Dr. Lindsey Hamilton.

"Everyone has negative thoughts, but recognizing that those thoughts aren't productive and shifting those thoughts in a new direction can help reset someone's mindset and help them see setbacks not as barriers but as challenges to overcome," Hamilton says.

Try It!

Instead of asking, "How did you do?" or "How did you play?" ask: "Did you have fun today?"

— DR. LINDSEY HAMILTON





PARENTS: YOU CAN FLIP THE SCRIPT

Help support your student-athlete by countering their comments with these thought shifters:

WHEN THEY SAY:

“I’m so nervous, it’s too much pressure.”



YOU CAN SAY:

“You’re feeling that way because this is something that’s really meaningful to you. Trust in your preparation.”

“That went terrible!”



“What went well?”

“I screwed up.”



“What’s something positive you can take from this situation?”

“Everything went wrong.”



“When things go wrong, that’s an opportunity to thrive the most.”

“It’s too difficult.”



“You can thrive in difficult moments.”

3 Thought Regulation Strategies

1 Stop

Stop negative thoughts by simply thinking, “Stop!” or “Don’t go there.” You can also reinforce the statement by using imagery, such as visualizing a stop sign.

2 Verbalize

Tell someone about your thinking so they can help you replace your negative self-talk with more positive thoughts.

3 Park

“Park” any negative thoughts by writing them down and putting them aside in an envelope to be confronted later.

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Fletcher D. & Sarkar M. (2016). “Mental fortitude training: An evidence-based approach to developing psychological resilience for sustained success.” *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action*, 7:3, 135-157.

**“Preparation is the strongest
opponent of fear and
uncertainty. There are no
shortcuts to success.”**

—Caiyi (Flora) Zhang,
junior golf star, 2023 IMG Academy
salutatorian and current Princeton
student-athlete

In 2022, IMG
Academy had 73
National Honor
Society inductees.

73



 IQ

THE WORLD LEADER IN SPORTS EDUCATION

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