



Mental Preparation in Cricket. How to prepare using psychological skills training and understanding what warming-up is and what it means to you.

**"Everyone has a will to win, but very few have a will to prepare."
(Vince Lombardi)**

How do you prepare? Have you seriously thought about mentally preparing for a game and match? Are you aware of how to prepare that will benefit you most of all? Or do you leave it down to the team warm-up and rely on luck and good fortune on the day?

We are all different as human beings and indeed our needs are different as a cricketer in the area of preparation especially within the area of mental preparation and warming up. According to John Syer and Christopher Connolly (1998) in their groundbreaking sport psychology textbook 'Sporting Body, Sporting Mind' — An Athlete's Guide to Mental Training state that **'warming up is more than just a physical process...if you are to perform well you must also be mentally and emotionally prepared... you may begin your preparation some days before the event.'**

Syer and Connolly (1998) both refer the term 'attunement' the verb 'attune' means 'to become aware' or to 'focus attention' the physical action of warming up is that of 'attuning to' your body and attuning to the body's needs. Whereas, the mental equivalent of the warm —up is focusing on the task in hand; the authors refer to 'psyching-up': which is getting yourself in the right mood to perform at the best and to produce your optimal performance. Syer and Connolly (1998) describe how in both cases the process involves first noticing your thoughts and feelings and then replacing the distracting elements. As these distractions that you don't recognise, will or could contribute to under-performance however physically well prepared you may be or think that you are.

HOW TO ATTUNE AND WHAT YOU NEED TO DO TO MENTALLY ATTUNE.

Syer and Connolly (1998) describe how six different factors affect our performance. So for you to ensure effective mental and emotional preparation—whether for competition, a training session or a team meeting consider each of these factors. Certainly taking into consideration the venue and travel time so as to arrive early and not be rushed will assist you in attuning mentally and emotionally to the game and day ahead.

However, it is important to emphasise that this is a personal and individual process and one that requires you to ask yourself **'what do I need to do to perform at my best today so that my team will benefit?'**

Being aware of what you need whether you are a batsman, bowler, keeper and batsman or an all rounder is paramount to being able to perform at your best. Just going through the motions doing the team warm-up is insufficient or indeed not giving yourself the best chance to perform well and at your best. Not being afraid to ask your coach or another



team member for some extra throw downs could be the tonic for you to perform well and feel good about your cricket. Leaving the team practice session knowing that you have not met your needs and practiced what you needed to do, could create worry and negative thoughts which will inhibit your performance. You need to know and be confident that you have prepared that you have prepared as well as you can and have and covered all areas. Take Johnny Wilkinson as an example for meticulous preparation and performance excellence. The England fly-half, during the World Cup and as part of his preparation he would practice drop kick, upon drop kick, at different angles and distances until it felt right and he knew he was ready and confident to be in his best performance state for England's next game.

Indeed the Surrey captain Jonathan Batty describes the importance of preparation in cricket to be the following "when preparing for professional sport mental preparation is equally if not more important than the physical and technical aspects..." and further describes **"mental preparation in cricket as being perhaps 90% to 99% of importance to overall game preparation."**

Preparation is key to success both at an individual level and team level. So how can you prepare fully and what can you do? Preparation should begin a couple of days early, and certainly the night before a game. Being aware and thinking about the opposition, the venue (home or away), and specific dietary requirements, past experiences, if negative turning them into positive ones. Using your best performances, at this particular venue to increase confidence and focus especially if you have a bogey venue and one that you have not performed at your best or well on a number of occasions.

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Here is a three-step plan to help you become better mentally prepared:-

STEP 1 -NIGHT BEFORE THE GAME/MATCH

Night Before (Thinking and Planning for Game)	Checklist (Y/N)

STEP 2 -MORNING OF THE GAME

Morning of Game (E.g. kit, food, water, sports drinks etc)	Checklist (Y/N)

STEP 3 - GAME PREPARATION ROUTINE -1 HR

Time	Checklist What I need to do
1 hr before	Mental Technique Fitness Nutrition
60mins	e.g., aware of individual needs and wants for game.
45mins	
30mins	e.g., visualisation of batting performance
20mins	
10mins	e.g., look at confidence cue cards
5mins	e.g., positive statements/ triggers

Finally, Graham Gooch arguably England's finest ever batsman points out that **"if you prepare properly it gives you the confidence to go out and perform at your best and leads to better performance... Preparing properly is the given ability to succeed."**



Mental factors which influence performance

a) The place where you are to perform	Examples walking around/on the pitch/ at the crease
b) Your physical sensations, thoughts and feelings	binning negative thoughts/aware of distractions
c) The individuals you are with	appreciate and know others strengths and roles
d) The group or team of which you are a part	team vision/goals/ understanding their beliefs
e) Your objectives or purpose	include in preparation plan/ being clear/focused
f) Your tactics or way in which you intend to reach those objectives prepare thoroughly and meet needs	