

You BEGIN teaching "Toughness" in the out-of-season (weight room, mat room, ETC.). See below:

PUSHING THROUGH THE MENTAL BARRIERS ("BEAR" BRYANT)

Often times, there exists only a very fine line between a winning and losing effort in an athletic contest. More often than not, this is due to the degree of mental concentration utilized by the athlete. This concentration cannot be developed in the span of a few days or hours before the contest. It must be worked on weeks and months during the training season to develop sound habits.

Athletes must be prepared to compete in a variety of situations. Namely: (1) heat, (2) cold, (3) wind, (4) fatigue, (5) falling behind, (6) hurt, (7) angry, etc. All these situations require that they show a little more class and concentration than the opponent. How do we prepare for maximum concentration? Let's start with the basics.

First, have a goal. Second, have a plan to achieve that goal. Third, begin plan and follow through.

Every good athlete is and should be ready to mentally follow his plan. Every time you give in to not doing your workout correctly, you lose some of your ability to achieve! When a situation arises in an athletic contest that is tough, you must know that you are capable of NOT giving up because you have faced tough situations in a workout session.

Here are some guidelines:

1. Be mentally alert to begin workout. Don't wait until halfway through to "wake-up".
2. Concentrate even on the smallest detail. Do everything exactly as taught by the coaches.
3. Take pride in everything you do --- Be a leader!
4. Mentally visualize all day long doing things correctly.
5. Don't hold back. Push yourself beyond your mental limits. Often the mind hold back what the body can do. You can do it! A good example is weight training. Get strong! Challenge yourself on how much you can handle. Mental concentration can make a 10-15% difference with what you can move. This could be the winning edge.
6. On conditioning work, learn to push yourself through the pain barrier. Pain is a part of athletics; you must often compete when tired. If you have not faced and conquered pain in practice, you will not be able to in a contest!
7. Don't associate with people who don't want to work, and pay a price. Associate with winners who ALWAYS want to improve. Losers try to find people who they can loaf with --- Be a winner!

ANYONE CAN LOSE.....

ONLY SPECIAL PEOPLE CAN WIN.

Here is ANOTHER way to get this across to the players:

PLAYING WITH MORALE AND INTENSITY (with thanks to Bud Wilkinson)

“Fatigue makes cowards of us all” (Vince Lombard)

There is no magic formula for developing morale, but there is a means of getting consistent effort from your team and intensity is what it is all about. How close do your players come to making their best effort every time the ball is snapped? That is what it is all about, and if your team can do that then they are going to play very well. My theory of judging how well a team is coached is not how many games they won that they shouldn't have won (they upset somebody), it's games they lost when they were a superior team, they didn't play well that day. And why didn't they play well --- nobody got geared up about it. Teach your players to think of the game totally as a chance to find out about themselves --- what kind of a man am I and how well can I play when it is tough to play? You begin by explaining to them that this is a most uncomfortable game to play. There is no way you can play football and feel good. The first two or three plays everybody feels good. But now I am the Nose Tackle and I have got to meet someone me and now it's a sweep and I've got to run 20 yards and there is a big collision and I've got to line up again and meet somebody and run 20 yards and then there is another collision. I do this three or four times and I don't feel good. Now, do I quit at this point and wait to get my breath or do I continue to go as hard as I can to try as hard as I can try? THAT'S WHERE THE GAME IS WON OR LOST! What happens to most teams is they play the first two or three plays as well as they can, then they get to a point, I used to call this the “QUITTING DOWN”, where two or three guys tell themselves, “If I coast on this play then I'll be able to go real hard on the next one”. They have gotten kind of tired so they coast for a while. So they go hard again but now a few others decide it is time for them to coast and the result of this is that you never get eleven guys going all out.

So to get back to the basic point, if you can convince your people that the reason for playing is for them to find out about themselves and for them to find out how close they can come to playing as well as they can on every snap. Then you can eliminate, I think, that “up and down”. So now I have three practices and I get the men together after practice and I ask them, “how many of you think you went as hard as you could every time” and if anybody puts his hand up he is lying. “How many of you did it 90% of the time”, I don't think you get any hands if you have an honest relationship. “80% of the time”, you will get some hands and you explain to them again, that's not very good if you expect to be a good football team, and we've got to make the effort every time the ball is snapped and if you don't think you can, walk off the field --- it takes more courage than standing out there bluffing. I'm never going to know if you make the big effort, and your teammates are not going to know if you make the big effort, but you are going to know and the whole game is a test of yourself. Now, if your players understand this, and I think if you explain it to them they will, some days they are going to play a guy in a red shirt who is a super athlete, some other day it will be a guy in a green shirt who cannot play a lick but that does not effect your guy's performance at all because his whole purpose is to find out today how close, “I can come to making my maximum effort every time they snap the ball”. After the game in the locker room, “Okay how many of you went the best you could everytime”, I don't think you will ever see any hands. How many of you went 95%”, maybe one. “90%”, maybe 4. But this is something that if they understand what I'm talking about, as the season goes along more and more of them will be able to get their hand up and if you can ever get them all giving their best effort then it is going to be awfully hard to beat you. And the major thing that happens is this, if you players begin to think this is just an opportunity to for me to find out about myself, “today, how close can I come to doing the best I possibly can”, then it doesn't matter whether you are supposed to win by four touchdowns, because the objective has nothing to do with that, their objective is to find out about themselves. Or, they are supposed to lose by three, that has nothing to do with it. It is simply a

question of "today, am I able to beat MYSELF". I'm the toughest opponent that anybody ever had, there is no question about that. If they do honestly believe that, that is the purpose of the game, then I believe they will play consistently with MAXIMUM INTENSITY!!! Get everyone on the field doing that – it will be very hard for anyone to defeat you!