

## VIII. SOME IMPLICATIONS OF THE DM PROCESS FOR ATHLETIC COMPETITION

### Introduction

Long before I created the DM process, when I was living in San Francisco in the late-1970s, I decided I would learn to play tennis. I wasn't particularly interested in the game, but Arlene, my wife at the time, wanted to learn so I agreed to also. A friend suggested I read Tim Gallwey's book, *The Inner Game of Tennis*,<sup>1</sup> which, he said, described a revolutionary approach to teaching tennis. I read the book, found it fascinating and decided that, if I was going to have tennis lessons, I'd like to have them with the author of that book. I contacted Tim and he agreed to give Arlene and me lessons when we were in the Los Angeles area, which is where he and his wife, Sally, lived.

A few weeks later Arlene and I flew to Los Angeles to visit friends and, while we were there, had our first lesson with Tim. Except for having hit a tennis ball with Arlene a few times, with the ball usually going into the net or over her head, I knew nothing about the game. Tim started by having us do a few exercises designed to get us to learn how to focus on the ball. After a few minutes Tim said he'd like me to try serving. I immediately asked him a lot of questions: "How should I hold the racquet? How should I throw the ball in the air? What should I do?" I was flabbergasted when Tim ignored all my questions and told me to start serving and just to be aware of where the ball hit the ground. "Tell me how to do it!" I pleaded. He smiled and answered: "Just be aware of where the ball hits."

The first ten or fifteen times I tried to serve the ball either hit the net or hit the ground far beyond the back line. Tim reminded me a few times to be aware of where the ball was landing. I responded in exasperation: "It's hitting in the wrong place!" All of a sudden something strange started to happen. The balls started hitting the court in bounds. After a few more minutes, they were clearing the net and landing within the lines on a consistent basis. Then Tim said: "Just be aware of how you are throwing the ball in the air." I tried that and after a few minutes my results improved even more.

There were other exercises and other surprises. Tim never once told Arlene or me how to play tennis. He only gave us things to focus on while we tried to serve, volley, etc. In each case, after a short time, we were doing a fairly good job without detailed instructions.

After the lesson we sat down to talk. "What happened out there?" I asked Tim incredulously. Tim explained about Self 1 and Self 2. Self 1 is the little voice inside our head that is always judging what we do and instructing us what to do. Self 2 is us, the doer, the responder to the instructions. Self 2 operates unconsciously and automatically, unless it is interfered with by Self 1. The key to better tennis lies in improving the relationship between Self 1 and Self 2.

As Tim put it in his book: "... it is the constant 'thinking' activity of Self 1, the ego-mind, which

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<sup>1</sup>Random House, New York, 1974

causes interference with the natural *doing* processes of Self 2."

Thus, all the exercises Tim was having us do were designed to quiet the mind so that Self 2 would engage, *naturally*, in the instructed activity, e.g., serving, without Self 1 getting in the way.

We had several more lessons with Tim over the course of the next year. At some point I realized I really didn't enjoy hitting a ball back and forth over a net and decided to stop playing tennis. By then, however, Tim and I had gotten to be friends, having four-hour-long dinner conversations about transformation.

The next sport I took up while living in California was skiing. Arlene had been skiing for years and had been trying unsuccessfully to get me to accompany her. Finally I relented. Much to my surprise, I loved it. Skiing down a hill was the closest I'd ever get to flying (like a bird) and it was the most exhilarating feeling I had ever had. I wanted more. When I returned home I called Tim and told him I wanted to learn how to ski and asked if he knew of someone who taught skiing the way he taught tennis. He did. He had written a book with Bob Kreigel on *The Inner Game of Skiing*. I had a week-long ski clinic with Bob and his associates and then spent several days skiing with Horst Abraham, the head of Vail's ski school. Horst utilized the same principles as Tim. The more I skied, the more fun it became and Arlene and I began driving to Lake Tahoe to ski as often as we could.

The lessons I had taken from several people utilizing Tim's basic approach led to me becoming a pretty good skier rather quickly, without ever being told how to move my knees, how to plant my pole, how to lean, or how to do anything else. I just focused on different parts of my body at different times and noticed what I was doing. Before long, my body started to make changes naturally and my skiing kept improving.

For many years I didn't think any more about the connection between the mind and body regarding athletic competition. In 1979 I moved back to New York and several years after that I developed the DM process. Then on June 9, 1989, I read Dave Anderson's sports column in the *New York Times*. He wrote about Tom Watson, who had "reigned for eight years as the world's best golfer. ... When the 1985 golf tour began, he was still only 35 years old, already a Hall of Fame golfer even though he had only begun to win.

"But ever since, it's as if an imposter were swinging Tom Watson's golf clubs. Except for a \$360,000 jackpot in the 1987 Nabisco championship, he hasn't won a tournament in the last five years."

By the summer of 1989 when I read the article about Watson I already had a good deal of experience in assisting people to disappear beliefs. I also remembered what I had learned about the mind-body connection from Tim, Bob, and Horst. I showed the article to Shelly and said: "I think the DM process can help him. I'm going to write and tell him about it and see if he's

interested."

A couple of weeks later I received a letter from Watson, thanking me for my "letter of concern and offer of professional help. I am aware of the relationship between attitude and performance and have experienced many negatives over the past five or six years." He went on to say that he was working on his attitudes and thought the path he had chosen would "free up my mind and swing to the point where success will begin again."

Even though Watson had rejected my offer of assistance, writing to him had gotten me thinking: "How can the DM process be used to help people improve their performance in athletic competition? And how, specifically, do beliefs, attitudes and feelings affect the body?" In November, 1990, I read an article by Tony Schwartz in *New York Magazine*, "Mind Game: Sports Psychologist Jim Loehr Teaches Tension-Free Tennis." That article answered many of the questions I had been wrestling with and a couple of Loehr's books answered most of the rest.<sup>2</sup>

I created an hour-long presentation on "How to Use Your Mind to Improve Your Game," in which I discussed the principles of the mind-body sports connection and how the DM process could impact the mind side of the equation. I delivered this talk from time to time at county clubs, tennis and racquetball facilities, etc. for about a year, learning a lot from my discussions with the players who attended. The rest of this chapter is based largely on that presentation and on two case histories that describe how the DM process helped an amateur golf state champion and a nationally-ranked amateur racquetball player.

### "It's What Between Their Ears"

In order to make the material in this chapter personally real to you, I'd like to start by asking you the same questions I asked my audiences: Whatever sport you play, how often do you play up to your potential, i.e., if you rank your best performance a 10, how often do you play at a 10? ...

Most people answer 5 to 20 percent of the time. Several people answered, "Only once, and I've never done that well since."

The next question I'd like you to ask yourself is: If you can play at a 10 sometimes, why can't you do it more frequently? You obviously have the physical skills and ability or you wouldn't have been able to do it that one time. ...

The reason your game isn't consistent and you don't play up to your potential most of the time is strictly mental -- specifically, your beliefs, attitudes, and feelings -- all of which are within your power to change.

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<sup>2</sup>Jim Loehr at the time was director of sports science for the U. S. Tennis Association and Director of Sports Psychology at the Nick Bollettieri Tennis Academy in Florida. He has worked with and helped Sabatini, Tom Gullikson whose pro ranking jumped 75 places after working with Loehr, Martina Navratilova, Monica Seles, and Aaron Krickstein. He also has worked with golfers, hockey players, etc.

Obviously you need the appropriate skills but, as Loehr points out, "the distinguishing trademark of great players in any sport is not so much their exceptional talent, but rather their exceptional ability to consistently play at the peak of their talent."<sup>3</sup>

Many others agree:

A story in *USA Today* pointed out: "For years, golf's top players have agreed: little separates the physical capabilities of the world's 100 or so best players. The difference between success and failure, they agree, largely depends on their approach, their handling of crisis situations on the course, their response to pressure, the ability to handle their emotions and fears and doubts. In short, it's the mental side of the game."<sup>4</sup>

Shane Murphy, director of sports science for the U. S. Olympic Team concluded: "At the level of the Olympics nowadays, there's not a whole lot of difference among the athletes in terms of physical talent and training. Ultimately, it's going to come down to what's between their ears."

Robert H. Helmick, president of the U. S. Olympic Committee stated: "We've come to recognize that at the top the difference is so minute between a gold, silver, or bronze medal, or nothing at all. And as athletes have looked for any way to shave off that fraction of a second, it's become apparent that the ability to be mentally prepared can be the factor that makes the difference."

Len Linseman, the Boston Bruins center, said in 1989 that a psychologist can "help create a positive attitude, to help a player cope with the ups and downs and criticisms and glories. If they can help you to be mentally stronger, that's great, because as any player who's been around knows, after a certain point, the game is all mental."

PattiSue Plumer, who in 1990 was ranked No. 1 in the 3,000-meter and the 5,000-meter events, said: "As an athlete, I've learned that the mind plays a much stronger role than anything physiological."

Many of us believe that when we play well, we feel good. The evidence suggests that we have it backward: when we feel good, we play well.

Andre Agassi, one of the world's best tennis players, agrees: "People always say that winning makes you believe in yourself, but with me, it's a little different. It's believing in myself that makes me win. I just have to find the right way."

What you will discover in this chapter is how your beliefs affect how you feel -- which, in turn, affects your ability to play up to your potential consistently -- and how the DM process can be

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<sup>3</sup>*Mental Toughness Training For Sports: Achieving Athletic Excellence*, James E. Loehr, Ed.D., The Stephen Greene Press, New York, 1982

<sup>4</sup>April 9, 1992

used in two different ways to change your beliefs.

Specifically, we'll look at the mechanism of how our attitudes, feelings, and beliefs affect our body and how to change our attitudes, feelings, and beliefs in order to maximize the positive effect of the mind on our game.

A suggestion: as in the parenting chapter, you will get the most value from this chapter if you participate. I urge you to do the exercises.

### The Relevance of the Mind-Body Connection in Athletic Competition

If you're like most serious amateur competitors, you don't complain very much about your physical limitations. Here is a list of some of the most common complaints. Which sound familiar to you?

- ! "It's not that I don't know what to do, it's that I don't do what I know."
- ! "The harder I try, the worse I seem to perform."
- ! "I know exactly what I'm doing wrong on my forehand (or my putting, or my footwork, etc.), but I just can't seem to break the habit."
- ! "When I concentrate on one thing I'm supposed to be doing, I flub something else."
- ! "I'm my own worst enemy; I usually beat myself."

Notice that every one of these complaints is a mental one, and each one impairs your ability to play effectively. How?

Here's a clue. How many of you seem to do better in practice than in competition? ... Why do you think there's a difference? ... The pressure!

"If you can take the pressure off yourself," Loehr contends, "then winning will take care of itself."

Why? What's the connection between pressure and your ability to perform?

Tony Schwartz points out in his article that "Thoughts about losing or playing poorly may lead to fear and anxiety, which prompt an array of physiological reactions such as increased heart rate, muscle tightness, shortness of breath, reduced blood flow to the hands and feet, and even narrowing of vision. All of these reactions make it impossible to play up to one's potential. "

Loehr explains how these emotions produce the physiological changes: "Scientific studies show that adrenaline flow corresponds to the level of stress. Sports like tennis that require precise concentration, delicate motor control, and balance necessitate adrenaline levels that are only slightly above normal resting rates. We are all familiar with the dreaded 'adrenaline rush' just before a big point or game. This mass discharge of adrenaline for tennis players nearly always translates into the 'choking response' and tight, uncoordinated play.

"What does adrenaline do? It actually prepares the body for short, sudden bursts of intense activity. Dramatic increases in adrenaline make you stronger and increase your endurance, but your ability to control motor skills and maintain a moment-to-moment intense concentration decreases. Blood flow to the heart and vital organs increases while flow to the hands and feet declines. Most tennis players report that their feet start feeling heavy and slow, their hands loose. As blood flow is diverted away from the limbs to the skeletal and heart muscles, hitting the tough returns and passing shots becomes increasingly difficult."<sup>5</sup>

Muscle relaxation is crucial in that it has been closely linked to maximum power and accuracy. Schwartz pointed out that "Athletes in an ideal performance state would always report that they felt a profound sense of muscle relaxation." Harvard psychologist, Edmund Jacobson, found that as you become anxious and mentally uptight, your muscles will most likely show a corresponding increase in tension.

Again Loehr explains why: "When we use too much strength, or when we 'muscle' our movements, we experience a loss of quickness and accuracy. Early fatigue may be another important consequence. Also, the natural link system of your body becomes unmanageable; movement becomes jerky and uncoordinated; the body's natural timing, rhythm, and flow become blocked. ...

"Research indicates that there is a 'zone of activation,' an ideal performance state that can be measured by one's heart rate. This varies depending on the sport and the individual. When the heart rate falls below or above the ideal range, performance suffers." In tennis, the rate is between 55% and 75% of maximum (which is 220 minus your age). So if you're 40, for example, the optimal heart rate is between 99 and 135.

Do you ever find that your performance sometimes drops immediately after winning a big point or a game or set, or beating par on a hole? ...

After winning important points, your heart rate frequently drops. Such decreases in intensity often result in decreased performance.

Nervousness causes dramatic increases in your heart rate. Anger also causes increases, except when you are already nervous or experiencing stress, in which case anger reduces your heart rate.

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<sup>5</sup>*The Mental Game: Winning at Competitive Tennis*, James E. Loehr, The Stephen Greene Press/Pelham Books, Penguin, 1990

What are some of the things you do to reduce your nervousness? ...

As players enter competition, they look for ways to control their nervousness. Some of you might have discovered that being pessimistic reduces pressure, i.e., if you don't expect anything of yourself you aren't as nervous about winning. Being positive often increases pressure. After a while, however, you discover that even though you have reduced your nervousness, you also have reduced your overall level of effectiveness in the sport. A negative attitude reduces the energy necessary to play at your peak.

### Mistakes

"The emotional downfall for most players is mistakes," according to Loehr. "Mistakes can trigger strong emotional responses (disappointment, embarrassment, anger, temper, low intensity) that can cause inconsistent or poor play. For some players, nearly every mistake represents an emotional crisis. But it's interesting to note that everyone manages mistakes the same way when they're playing well. They simply turn and walk away confidently, as if nothing happened. Ideally, the best emotional response to mistakes is to get challenged. A mistake is simply feedback to the mental computer that the shot wasn't perfect, that some adjustment is necessary. And the simple fact is that without mistakes, the learning process would be permanently blocked. No mistakes, no progress. But negative emotion also blocks the progress and is a natural response to mistakes. So what's the answer? The answer is that players must train emotionally so that mistakes produce the right emotional response."

It might be possible to "train emotionally," but ultimately emotions are the result of beliefs. Change the belief and the emotion changes automatically. Imagine the following: You have the beliefs that a ball being hit into the net (or into the rough, etc., depending on your sport) is a mistake, and mistakes mean there is something wrong with you. Now imagine that the ball hits the net or goes into the water. What would you have to feel? ... Angry at yourself, annoyed, frustrated, hopeless, etc.

Now imagine this scenario: You realize that the idea of a "mistake" is only an interpretation; it is meaning created by you to describe an outcome or event that has no inherent meaning. You are clear that there is no meaning in the world. Thus, you have the belief that there is no such thing as a mistake, that every stroke or shot in whatever sport that doesn't go where you intended it to go is an opportunity to learn how to improve your game. Now imagine that the ball hits the net or goes into the water. What would you have to feel? ... You might find it difficult to imagine right now that there are only outcomes and no mistakes, but just do your best to imagine the scenario I've just described. Okay? ... What would you feel? ... Challenged, calm, curious, or possibly nothing at all.

What happens physiologically when you think you've made a mistake? Too much negative energy, i.e., being too excited, too angry, too anxious. Some typical signs of over-arousal include:

- ! Legs feel weak and rubbery.
- ! Difficulty in concentrating and focusing.
- ! Everything seems to be going faster than it really is.
- ! Inability to think clearly and accurately.
- ! Attention gets focused on one thing and refocusing is difficult.
- ! Become fatigued very quickly.

Changing your belief about mistakes would minimize these conditions.

### Stress Is an Interpretation

"The greatness of a Gretsky, a Connors, a Palmer, or an Evert is not that they perform well under pressure," Loehr contends. "No one performs well under pressure. Their greatness is in their learned ability to take the pressure off. ... In the face of great external pressure, these [top] performers felt almost no anxiety. To the contrary, they felt calm and peaceful inside but also highly energized, positive, and enthusiastic..."

"It is this skill that separates the superstars from the troops -- they have the ability to take pressure off, transforming crisis into opportunity and threat into challenge. All that stands between you and that ability is your own head! ... Pressure is something you put on yourself."

I explained earlier that nothing is inherently stressful. In other words, stress doesn't exist "out there"; it only exists in the mind; it's an interpretation. Change the interpretation, by changing beliefs, and the stress will disappear. By changing your beliefs, something that had been experienced as stressful can be experienced as fun or as challenging. Remember in the last chapter you did an exercise about imagining yourself being given responsibility for a major project in two different situations: believing you can do it well and believing that you probably will fail. You noticed two totally different emotional reactions: excitement and challenge, or fear and stress. In other words, as Dr. Sagan put it, stress is a function of whether or not we believe we can cope with the situation we encounter.

This principle is crucial in athletic competition.

### Playing To Win Versus Just Playing Your Best

A sports psychologist, C. S. Dweck, Ph.D., has researched what produces the feeling of helplessness in sports. He distinguishes between learning goals and outcome goals. Top players have learning goals, i.e., goals that are built around effort, rather than outcome goals, i.e., goals that



are built around final results, such as winning. A sense of helplessness is almost inevitable when we have outcome goals rather than learning goals. Why?

You conclude that you are helpless when you frequently set goals that are not in your control and then do not reach them. Once you have concluded that you are helpless, then the slightest sign of adversity will validate your belief about yourself and lead you also to conclude: "There's nothing I can do. I'll never be able to deal with this situation."

Winning a game is not within your control. You do not have control over the skills and level of play of your competition. You do have (or can have) control over your own game, i.e., you do have control over playing up to your highest potential and constantly increasing that potential.

You have a choice: to play to win or to do your best. If you believe that your worth as a person is a function of winning at sports, each game will be experienced as a threat to your self-esteem and results in significant stress. What if you shifted that belief so that you really believed -- not just said it to yourself and hoped it was true -- that you already were a worthy person and that your goal was not to win, but to play to your fullest potential? Then each game would be an opportunity to express the worth you already have, instead of the need to prove your worth. Each game would be merely a game -- rather than a test of your worthiness. There would be nothing at stake.

Most stress -- i.e., anxiety, tension, and fear -- associated with performance stems from concerns about losing, winning, looking bad or playing poorly. If you didn't have those concerns, you wouldn't experience much stress -- and your game would improve.

Some successful coaches realize this. The former Washington football head coach, Joe Gibbs, was described in a New York Times article a couple of years ago as "a motivator, seeking to move his players, not so much to beat their opponents as to play the best they can, and consequently, by achievement of this mastery over self, to defeat their opponents. The opposition will fall either because they are not fulfilling their potential or because their potential, even when fully realized, is not up to the potential to be realized by the Redskins."

In other words, you can't play better than up to your highest potential. If that's better than your opponent, you will win. If not, you will lose. If your goal is to play your best, and keep improving the level of your best, you can almost totally eliminate stress, usually experience satisfaction while playing, and will experience "winning" regardless of the score. But if your goal is to win, then you will experience a lot of stress, frequently won't experience satisfaction just from playing the game, and will only experience "winning" when your score is better than someone else's.

Andre Agassi is quoted as saying: "Up until 1986 I was competitive but could only accept winning. Winning was everything. If I wasn't winning I couldn't handle it. I've come to understand that my problems on the court were really problems in me off-court."

"Suddenly I realized I could still be competitive and say 'nice shot.' And it's not a facade ... the thought of losing doesn't bother me now. It only bothers me if I haven't given 100% effort. So the pressure is off. If I lose, I lose. I now know that if I stay positive and keep on working, my talent will eventually come out."

Just before the 1992 U. S. Open, when Jim Courier was ranked number one in the world, he was quoted as saying: "I like my chances on any surface against anybody in the world. It's really as simple as that. I'm not thinking of rankings or defending titles or anything except improving my game and playing the best tennis I can play. If I take care of that, the rest will take care of itself."

Again Loehr sums it up nicely: "The best competitors go well beyond loving to win. They have learned to love the struggle, the battle, the confrontation. To love winning is easy; to love the struggle makes a great competition."

### Competition or Cooperation

Tim Gallwey describes an alternative motivation to the need to compete to win:

"Why does the surfer wait for the big wave? The answer is simple, and it unraveled the confusion which surrounds the true nature of competition. The surfer waits for the big wave because he values the challenges it presents. ... the more challenging the obstacle he faces, the greater the opportunity for the surfer to discover and extend his true potential. The potential may have always been within him, but until it is manifested in action, it remains a secret hidden from himself. The obstacles are a necessary ingredient to this process of self-discovery. Note that the surfer in this example is not out to *prove* himself; he is not out to show himself or the world how great he is, but is simply involved in the exploration of his latent capacities. He directly and intimately experiences his own resources and thereby increases his self-knowledge. ...

"Reaching the goal itself may not be as valuable as the experience that can come in making a supreme effort to overcome the obstacles involved. The process can be more rewarding than the victory itself. ...

"So we arrive at the startling conclusion that true competition is identical with true cooperation. Each player tries his hardest to defeat the other, but in this use of competition it isn't the other *person* we are defeating; it is simply a matter of overcoming the obstacles he presents. In true competition no person is defeated. Both players benefit by their efforts to overcome the obstacles presented by the other."

### Application of DM to Improving Your Game

What have we discovered so far about the mind-body connection with regard to athletic competition?

- ! We rarely perform as well as our ability would permit.
- ! The reason for this is almost always mental.
- ! Anxiety and fear set off chemical and physiological responses that literally impair our body's ability to perform up to its potential.
- ! Stress is one of the major sources of anxiety, and two of the major sources of stress are trying to not make mistakes and trying to win.
- ! Stress is not inherent in the game, but is a function of our beliefs.
- ! If you could change the appropriate beliefs, you could reduce your stress level, thereby significantly improving your results, whatever your skill level at the time.

My DM sessions with Sean, a top amateur racquetball player, illustrates these points. In our first session, he described a dysfunctional pattern he had been unable to change:

"When I get ahead of a better player, I feel if he doesn't blow it, he'll beat me. Usually I lose." In other words, once he judged another player to be better than him, even when he got ahead of that player, his game would somehow fall apart and he'd usually lose.

The belief he found that produced that situation: *I have the physical attributes to be good, but not great.* He elaborated: "When I watch a great athlete play, I don't think I could be that strong, that fast, could have as big a serve -- all the things that make a great athlete."

The source of that belief came from comments his coaches made when in he was in high school. At that time he was a bit "chunky"; he wasn't as fast or strong as most of the people he played with because of his excess weight. His coaches told him repeatedly that he'd have to work harder at his game than other players who had more talent. By the end of the session the belief was gone.

The pattern he described at his next session was: "When I expect to beat a guy and then lose three or four points in a row -- e.g., he gets a lucky shot, I get a bad call, I miss a shot I feel I should have made -- I get angry, I blame something other than myself and I find excuses, I lose my drive and purpose, then I get tight and get hesitant to take shots I'd normally take, and frequently blow the game."

The belief that led to that situation was: *They don't deserve to beat me.* Thus, if it looks as if someone he thinks he should beat might beat him, he has a strong negative emotional response.

This belief came from the extreme amount of time he puts in practicing and getting in shape

compared with most other players, which is what he was told was required for success by his early coaches. In other words, he felt he did more of what was required to win than his opponents did. Thus, he deserved to beat them and he got very upset when it looked as if he might not.

Although his game had improved after the first two sessions, he returned for a third session to report another pattern: "When I have the opportunity to make a 'kill' shot, I frequently pull back at the last minute and hit a safe passing shot."

When he discovered the belief leading to that pattern he had a hard time acknowledging it, but at some point he admitted he believed: *I don't deserve (to win)*. Consciously Sean thought he did deserve to win, but deep down he had a gut feeling he was afraid to acknowledge that he didn't deserve to win. He didn't even know he had the belief until we had our session together. After he discovered that this belief came from his early childhood relationship with his parents and saw alternative explanations, this belief also disappeared.

We had a couple more sessions at which he dealt with two additional patterns and eliminated two more beliefs: one having to do with his game and one with his self-esteem.<sup>6</sup>

Immediately after the fifth session he reported that he had significantly improved his game and his attitude: "I'm playing closer to my potential, more often. I'm not being dragged down by my mind." Both before we started our work together and after the last session he took a written test devised by Jim Loehr to measure self confidence, attention control, motivation level, positive energy, attitude control, etc. His scores almost doubled after the five sessions.

Two years later he reported that he was ranked fourth in the country as an amateur. "My game is the best it's ever been. With no negatives in my head, I have a lot more possibilities. I had a fantastic year and am extremely pleased with my game."

As I was writing this chapter I called Sean for an update. He told me: "I just finished a great season. I'm still ranked about fourth in the amateur standings. I only lost one match out of about

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<sup>6</sup>If a child concludes *I'm not good enough* or *I'm not worthy*, and then notices that he gets love and attention from his parents only when he achieves specific results, he is likely to form a survival strategy such as, *I'm important when I produce results* or *What makes me important is doing better than others*. If you are worthwhile only if you win, but you have no control over winning, you would have to experience significant anxiety every time you played.

Gallwey has pointed out: "I have taught many children and teenagers who were caught up in the belief that their self-worth depended on how well they performed at tennis and other skills. For them, playing well and winning are often life-and-death issues. They are constantly measuring themselves in comparison with their friends by using their skill at tennis as one of the measuring rods. It is as if some believe that only by being the best, by being a winner, will they be eligible for the love and respect they seek."

a hundred to someone ranked lower than me. Remember how that used to be a serious problem for me? Overall, if playing in the Zone is 100 percent, I'm at 80 to 90 percent of my potential all the time. I have higher concentration, a very high confidence level, and my play is smooth. I'm still using the DM process whenever something come up while I'm playing."

### Moment By Moment Use of The DM Process

In addition to the five beliefs Sean disappeared, he also is using a variation of the DM process moment-by-moment during play. In order to understand how it works, remember a time when you missed a short putt, you double faulted, you threw a bowling ball into the alley, etc. ... What did you feel? What did you think? ... Are you aware of frequently feeling in these types of situations: "I'm getting worse," or "I've blown it again," or "I'll never get it right," or "I'm having a bad day."

Those judgments produce stress, which lead to physiological changes in the body, which produce poorer play, which lead to more negative evaluations.

Get in touch with that moment and that feeling or thought. Can you see that it feels like you actually perceived the experience -- as opposed to interpreting what actually happened? In other words, doesn't it seem to you as if you observed in the world that *I'm having a bad day*, or *I'll never be able to putt*, etc.? By now it should be clear that, in fact, you didn't discover any of these things out in the world. They are all interpretations of what you did observe: a ball that didn't go where you wanted it to go. What does that event mean? It doesn't really mean anything, but once you say it means something, you have formed a belief. And then once you believe: *It's going to be a bad day*, guess what? You have created a bad day.

There is no point in eliminating this type of belief after the game in which it was created, because the belief usually only applies to that day, and won't necessarily be a problem the next game. But it is possible to use the principles of the DM process at the moment a belief gets created to eliminate it on your own. How? Get into the habit of watching your thought processes as you play. Notice when you interpret, i.e., judge, your performance as good or bad. As soon as you do, stop for a minute and realize that you just concluded that, for example, *I'm having a bad day*, based on one or more events. Acknowledge that that is a valid interpretation, i.e., you could be having a bad day. And then come up with four or five other interpretations, e.g., I had a single bad stroke; I'm having a bad first hole (or first game) and I'll improve as the day goes on; I lost my concentration for a moment and I'll get it right back; and it's taking me a few minutes to get warmed up. If there are five interpretations of your performance that are just as good as the one you concluded, can you see that what you concluded is only an interpretation and not the truth?

If you practice this technique you eventually can get to the point where you will catch yourself judging yourself and reaching conclusions, at the moment they occur. Then, as you begin to realize that there is no meaning in the world -- there are only events (if even those!) and all your judgments are merely in your head -- you can eliminate the beliefs as fast as they are created.

Remember, the actual perception does not produce stress. The interpretations do. It is possible to be able to distinguish between perceptions and interpretations, and substitute the perceptions for the interpretations on the spot.

Sean found that this technique was especially valuable in improving his game, as did a top golf amateur whose case history is reported below.

### Another Case History

Ralph was a First Team All American golfer in high school. He was offered a number of golf scholarships to college. At our first session he told me that he was in his last season of golf eligibility in college and that he intended to turn pro when he graduated in two years.

He was distraught: "I've played for 15 years and never had a long slump before. I've been in a slump now for about a year. No matter what I do, I can't get out of it."

We spent over an hour discussing when the slump started, what happened just before it started, how he felt, etc., before he was able to find the belief responsible for the slump: *I'm never going to be able to play well as long as I'm being coached by [my coach]. Why play well when [my coach] receives the credit for my achievements.*

Ralph told me about a series of incidents involving his coach that had Ralph lose confidence in him and eventually get very angry at him. Ralph got to the point where he no longer wanted to play college golf for his coach. Moreover, given his chosen major, he felt he would have been better off at several other schools. He blamed his decision to attend that college on the coach who "had conned me and lied to my dad in getting me to go to his school." Ralph felt that going to the college he was at had not helped him and actually had been a "deterrent in my game."

There was a final incident in which his coach told him to make some changes in his stroke two days before a big tournament, which led to disastrous results for Ralph. "I was mad at the coach for changing my game and I felt his advice from a few days earlier was the source of the bad round. I'm also angry at myself for listening to him." He saw other interpretations and the belief was gone.

At our second session he reported a pattern typical of many golfers: "If a round starts with a couple of boggies or I miss a short putt, it affects the rest of my game. I get nervous, lose patience; I develop a sense of urgency; I get aggressive; I take too many chances in an attempt to catch up -- all of which negatively affect the rest of my round. I can't get back into the flow; I can't get back into my game mentally."

When I asked him what he believed that could account for this pattern, he immediately responded: "If I screw up on one hole, there's no way to make it up. He eventually ended up with the belief: *If my first couple of shots are bad, I have to change something.*

The earlier events that led to that belief probably are common: "That's the way I learned to play. At the beginning my stroke was 'wrong,' and change was necessary. So I concluded that when I made a bad shot, my stroke was off and a correction was necessary. Now, however, the stroke is not the source of the problem -- it's probably my concentration, or I'm nervous, etc. -- but I now see I've been living and playing out of my earlier interpretation." After a few more minutes, the belief was gone.

Ralph called me about a month later. He was excited about playing again and was enjoying playing more than he had in a year. There was "a shift in my game as a result of the belief shift and also as a result of using the moment-by-moment technique, which is very helpful."

I didn't see Ralph for about seven months. At what turned out to be our final session Ralph reported this pattern: "The bigger the tournament, the harder I try. I have a different attitude at the bigger tournaments. I focus on winning a lot and that produces stress. I find that when I get ahead, my attitude changes and there is more of a focus on winning. I get to the point where instead of focusing on each shot, I focus on winning."

Ralph discovered a self-esteem belief, *I'm not important*, and two survival strategy beliefs: *Winning makes me important* and *Losing means I'm a failure, which means I'm a bad person, which means I'm not important*. After discovering the childhood circumstances that led to the three beliefs, they all disappeared.

When we spoke about a year later, he reported that the patterns he had reported were all gone. "I've calmed down and put things in perspective. The sessions really helped me."

I called him while I was writing this chapter for a progress report. He was working as a teaching pro, "doing very well in pro tournaments, and preparing for the PGA circuit. I've been shooting par and I'm happy with my game. I use the DM technology regularly while I'm playing. I used to take a bad day home, I don't anymore. I still think about winning more than I'd like, however."

I congratulated him on how well he was doing and then asked him if the beliefs he had eliminated in our sessions were still gone. They were. I explained that, if one of the patterns hadn't disappeared completely, he obviously hadn't identified and disappeared all of the beliefs that produced his focus on winning. Because he was working a thousand miles away, it would be difficult to meet, but we agreed to have another session if we found ourselves in the same city at some point.

### The Spiritual Aspect of Competition: In the Zone

The DM process also can help you spend more time "in the Zone."

Athletes describe this state as: a flow; having time stand still, extraordinary personal awareness,

profound inner stillness, exceptional energy, and puzzling feelings of slow motion, joy, power and control, being and playing out of one's head.

Gallwey describes the essence of this state: "When a tennis player is 'on his game,' he's not thinking about how, when, or even where to hit the ball. He's not *trying* to hit the ball, and after the shot he doesn't think about how badly or how well he made contact. The ball seems to get hit through an automatic process which doesn't require thought. There may be an awareness of the sight, sound and feel of the ball, and even of the tactical situation, but the player just seems to *know* without thinking what to do."

John Brodie, a former All-Pro quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers said: "Often, in the heat and excitement of a game, a player's perception and coordination will improve dramatically. At times, and with increasing frequency now, I experience a kind of clarity that I've never seen adequately described in a football story. Sometimes, for example, time seems to slow way down, in an uncanny way, as if everyone were moving in slow motion. It seems as if I have all the time in the world to watch the receivers run their patterns and yet I know the defensive line is coming at me just as fast as ever. I know perfectly well how hard and fast those guys are coming and yet the whole thing seems like a movie or dance in slow motion. It's beautiful."

Joe Namath, the New York Jets Hall of Fame quarterback, said that he noticed he wasn't playing in the game; the game was playing itself out through him. He was moving effortlessly and spontaneously in the right direction; everything was completely nonverbal; thought was not involved.

In 1972 Duane Thomas, then a running back for the Dallas Cowboys, led his team to a Superbowl championship. Thomas later described his spectacular ability to see whole patterns develop in slow motion. He could sense the complex motion around him with a sense of time that allowed him to pick and choose one option over another.

Have you ever experienced that state when you play your game? ... Describe it. ... When does it happen? ... What makes it go away? ... What are the conditions when it never happens? ...

Loehr uses the work "flow" to describe this state and defines it as when "awareness and action merge. ...

"According to Mihaly [Csikszentmihalyi, who wrote a book on the subject<sup>7</sup>], flow becomes possible when we act with total involvement, when action follows upon action with no need for deliberate, conscious intervention. ... here is a brief summary of the flow experience as he describes it:

! "Flow is that special state where everything we do is right and easy and automatic.

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<sup>7</sup>*Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Harper & Row, New York, 1990



- ! "Flow often accompanies activities that are perceived as being particularly enjoyable and fun.
- ! "Flow results from a narrowing of attention wherein the past and future are clearly abandoned and the *now* is all that remains.
- ! "Flow is a consequence of the special union of action and awareness.
- ! "Flow most commonly occurs during the performance of well-practiced and familiar routines, when action and reaction are so well-practiced that they become purely spontaneous.
- ! "Flow is rarely experienced when a situation demands a response that is clearly beyond the limits of a person's skill and talent.
- ! "During flow, movement simply seems to occur by itself, as if something else were causing it to happen.
- ! "Flow occurs when a person is aware of what he is doing at the time, but is not aware of his awareness. As soon as he reflects upon his awareness, the flow is temporarily lost.
- ! "Whenever we shift our focus to that of an observer, viewing from the outside, the flow is blocked. Examples of this would be such statements as, 'I can't believe I'm doing this' or 'Is this really me?' or 'I'm really flowing.' Ordinarily, the flow can be quickly re-established by properly centering one's attention."

Flow, or being in the zone, requires that nothing be at stake. You aren't thinking of what to do, how to do it, or feeling nervous about doing it. You're just doing -- actually, being -- it. The paradox is that you have to give 100% of your effort to letting it happen by itself. To the extent you eliminate beliefs that inhibit flow -- and create for yourself the experience that all of life is merely a game you created -- entering and staying in the Zone in athletic competition should be a lot easier. Sean has reported that he experiences being in the Zone much more frequently and for longer periods of time since our sessions.

### Conclusion

I've quoted Loehr extensively because he has identified and described the nature of the mind-body connection in athlete competition so well. I'll allow him to end this chapter:  
"The extent to which individuals or teams will perform toward the upper range of their talent and skill largely depends on the success they have in creating and maintaining a particular kind of mental climate within themselves. ... When the right internal conditions are present, playing

toward the upper range of your capabilities occurs automatically. ... [I've concluded that]

- "1. Your level of performance is a direct reflection of the way you feel inside.
2. When you feel right, you can perform right.
3. Playing well is a natural consequence of the right kind of internal feelings.
4. Playing as well as you can at the moment occurs *automatically* when the right emotional balance has been established.
5. In the final analysis, mental toughness is the ability to create and maintain the right kind of internal feeling regardless of the circumstances.
6. The most important step you can take to perform to your best is to create a particular climate within yourself and maintain it, *no matter what!* ...

"The right internal climate helps to bridge a gap, the gap between what you *can* do as an athlete and what you *actually do*, between your potential and the realization of that potential."

You can create the "right internal climate" by using the DM process in the two ways I've described:

- !           To literally disappear those beliefs you take with you into every game that are responsible for the undesirable patterns in your game and the stress you experience.
- !           To observe your judgments/interpretations during play and become aware that they are merely judgments/interpretations and not the truth so that they disappear on the spot.

draft 7/18/94  
8 1994 Morty Lefkoe