The Mental Training Room—Basketball

By John J. Bowman. Published 1993 by Mind Plus Muscle Institute for Applied Sport Psychology, 5225-49 Route 347, Port Jefferson Station, NY 11776. (U.S. $59.95)

Reviewed by Bill Allyson, Elite Performance Enhancement

“This program will take the athlete from planning and hoping to knowing and flowing. . . . You will develop more powerful ways of focusing your attention, setting and achieving goals, controlling your level of arousal, and using your unconscious mind to bring your performance to a new level of success” (Tape 1, “Introduction”). This introductory statement to The Mental Training Room—Basketball by John J. Bowman, Director of the Mind Plus Muscle Institute for Applied Sport Psychology, summarizes the intent of this program. Dr. Bowman received his training in clinical psychology, specializing in behavioral medicine. Since 1981 he has been a sport psychology consultant to professional, college, high school, and youth league athletes.

This mental training program is expressly for basketball; however, only one audiotape side includes specific references to basketball. Additional individual tapes, which can be purchased separately, may be used to replace the basketball-specific tape and customize the mental rehearsal section to any of 14 other sports currently offered.

Included in the program are three audio cassettes, a program guide or workbook, and four worksheets. The audiotape sides are entitled “Introduction,” “Goal Setting,” “Self-Hypnosis and Psychocybernetic Imagery,” “Ideal Performance State,” “Imagery Training,” and “Basketball Mental Rehearsal.” The program guide contains an outline of the 6-week program, a guide for the athlete, answers to relevant questions, and a Mental Training Record of progress. The four worksheets include the Weekly Mental Training Plan, the Dream Goal Sheet, and the Pre- and Postevent Worksheets. During the structured 6-week program, the athlete listens to 30 tape sides, completes seven worksheets and a pre- and postevent worksheet for each practice and competition during the 6 weeks, and checks off completed assignments.

The information and exercises in this program convey potent techniques for learning and refining specific mental skills. Athletes are regularly reminded to practice the exercises and are encouraged to be aware of their feelings as they perform and complete the exercises.

The primary objective of the goal-setting, self-hypnosis, and psychocybernetic imagery sections is to increase motivation and confidence by embedding goal-oriented statements into the unconscious mind. Goal setting is divided into understanding outcome and performance goals, selecting meaningful performance goals, overcoming potential obstacles, and supporting success with affirmations, which makes this skill usable for athletes.
A similarly detailed approach to the tensing–relaxing technique and floating imagery in self-hypnosis and psychocybernetic imagery is used. By achieving a deeply relaxed state through self-hypnosis and by intensifying this trance with floating imagery, appropriate conditions are created for direct acceptance of conscious thoughts into the unconscious mind. Dr. Bowman explains this concept, how to achieve it, and that it prolongs efforts and creates effective strategies.

The section on the ideal performance state is introduced to direct an athlete’s control over his or her level of arousal, emotional state, and attentional focus. Ideal levels of these three components are determined by recalling great performances and by collecting data before and after practice/competition on worksheets and correlating it with performance. A large portion of the tape is devoted to constructing a 0–10 scale to measure arousal, and very little is devoted to specifically gaining control over emotions and attention.

Imagery training is divided into visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and multi-imagery training. The visual, auditory, and multi-imagery sections are detailed and clever at times, and they were quite effective at getting me immersed in the specific skill. The kinesthetic section is more generalized and has less impact.

The mental rehearsal section is designed to apply multi-imagery skills to improving performance, which strengthens neurological pathways that have been previously encoded in the brain by physical movements. Circumstances specifically addressed are practicing or learning moves, game situations, and coping. Ideal performance state is incorporated into the rehearsal exercises, and feelings are regularly brought into the imagery and encouraged as lasting impressions of imagery work. The use of music is helpful. The key words, phrases, and images are potent. The directives on how to overcome obstacles are somewhat vague and unguided and are in need of an example, but the emphasis on gaining confidence and flowing back into an ideal performance state is well done.

Overall, the information is organized and functional for its purpose. The topics progress from the basics and interconnect well, culminating in highly developed mental skills by the end of the program. This program is not targeted for any specific age or education level, and I believe trials across skill level, age, education level, socioeconomic status, and culture are warranted.

The use of key words and concepts such as “focus inwardly,” “let go,” “go inside,” and “soft focus with eyes open” drew me into the various imagery and relaxation states, which are a large part of this program. However, while certain words or phrases (“inspirational affirmations,” for example) are explained, other words or phrases go unexplained and are likely to confuse some athletes. The use of examples was helpful to me, such as for distinguishing between dream (or outcome) and performance goals, yet the absence of examples for affirmations, motivational ideas to suggest to the unconscious mind, and other concepts could leave the athlete unclear about what is expected.

As a former college, high school, and youth basketball coach, and now a performance enhancement consultant to elite athletes, I am positively influenced by how Dr. Bowman brings together goal setting, relaxation, and imagery sessions in a comprehensive, clear, and purposeful manner. In a performance enhancement approach that uses drills and exercises for learning these skills or gaining awareness of what one is already doing naturally, this may be a useful program.

As I complete this review, I cannot pinpoint the ideal athlete this program is for, yet I feel it will help some. The program educates, but requires that the