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IMPROVE YOUR... **MENTAL PREPARATION** **- PRE-GAME**

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IMPROVE YOUR...

MENTAL PREPARATION – PRE-GAME

PRE-GAME PREPARATION

Officiating at the top level is usually as a result of great knowledge, experience and top pre-game preparation. Mental preparation before the game helps you warm up mentally and optimizes your arousal levels to get ready for the game. You feel more concentrated, more confident, ready, and in control while doing your pre-game preparation plan.

Although pre-game routines are personalized and different for each referee, this chapter will present some general guidelines to assist with your preparation.

Psychological or mental preparation for a game involves:

- Rule and Interpretation knowledge preparation – this knowledge is essential and basic, and should be at the highest level. The better you know the rule book, the better you'll be able to apply it in a real game situation. So, if you feel that you need to renew some of the rules' knowledge, you should read the rule book, repeat them visually through imagery and watch them on video clips.
- Game characteristics preparation – it refers to venue and teams characteristics (i.e. specific type of team strategy and play, current team position, coach behavior, player behavior, playing style of specific player, injured players, statistics of the team, fan zone characteristics, etc.). This kind of information can help you prepare for possible specific situations – i.e. player who usually likes to flop – and your reactions and game control solution for those situations.
- Crew characteristics preparation – knowing the characteristics of your co-officials and their officiating style will help you to know what to expect in a point of view of game control and criteria, and also, your reaction to their behavior and performance during the game. Knowing your co-officials' characteristics helps you prepare for the pre-game conference topics and establish the required criteria.
- Arousal control preparation – refers to your individual preparation through imagery, self-talk and solution mode thinking.
- Focus on performance (not on outcome) – during the preparation for the game it is really important that you are highly focused on your performance (What should I do and how will I do it?) not on the outcome (Will I officiate good?).

EXAMPLE 1: If before the game you start to think “How will I be evaluated by the observer?” or “How many good or bad decisions will I make?” you are not focusing on your performance but on the outcome. By changing your outcome goals for that game, i.e. “I want to be highly evaluated by the observer”, “I want to officiate this game without any mistakes” or “I want this game to end without any conflictive situations” to performance goals for that game, i.e. “I will concentrate on my AoR”, “I will search for the best position in each situation to make a good decision”, “In any conflictive situation with this challenging coach I will try to find the best possible solution to manage it” you are putting your focus and attention to your performance, to what you want to do in specific situations. By focusing on your performance you are getting closer to a better evaluation from the observer, higher number of good decisions, better game control.

EVENT PREPARATION

If you are nominated to officiate at some tournaments during the summer (U16, U17, U18, U19) it is important to also prepare for your expectations and focus on your daily and performance goals – How do I want to officiate? How will I prepare for each day for every game I'll be nominated?

EXAMPLE 2: If you start thinking that you want to officiate finals (outcome), it is important that you prepare for each game as if it were the finals itself. You should prepare for each game, step by step, you should not think about the final game until it comes. Because, by focusing in each game separately (game characteristics, crew characteristics, arousal control and performance goals) you are able to perform (officiate) better, and by officiating at your highest level you are closer to your ultimate goal – officiating the finals.

The more you're prepared, the more you'll feel confident and ready, but remember, as much as you are prepared, be also ready for the unexpected. The better you're prepared, the better you'll find the solutions for the unexpected situations.

EXERCISE 1: "WHAT IF" SCENARIOS

While preparing for a specific game, you can use "what if" scenarios to prepare for possible difficult or unexpected situations (i.e. fight between players, broken time machine, one referee is late for pre-game conference, etc.).

- Scenario: What do you expect can happen?
- Describe the situation
- How should I react in this situation? – your self-talk, behaviour and actions

This type of preparation helps you to stay calm when something unexpected happens and focusses you on solution mode thinking. Also, when something actually does go wrong, you will have a clear blueprint for dealing with it.

EXERCISE 2: MANAGING A DIFFICULT COACH OR A PLAYER

- Put on paper what are the characteristics of the coach/player that is troubling you in the last few games
- What are the situations that trigger his/her inappropriate behaviour?
- What is your reaction to this behaviour?
- How do you usually deal with him/her?
- Now, search for a better reaction and a possible game control scenario for that situation.
- How should I act, behave and talk to him/her?
- Think about the strategy as to how you will deal with it more successfully. See yourself acting in a calm, firm and professional manner.

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