

## **DEVELOPING MENTAL TOUGHNESS IN A YOUNG ATHLETE**

Developing mental toughness in a young athlete is an issue many parents and coaches struggle with. Over the many years I have had the opportunity to coach many players (boys and girls) and one thing I can tell you is the best players ARE mentally tough. They are the players who are aggressive with their dribble, taking the ball to the hoop, stealing the ball on defense, do not get flustered, etc. They have an "I can do it" attitude and they DO IT! It is a hard concept to get kids to understand but it is crucial to developing.

Understand that, not all of the best athletes have it. Young kids can be very fast or good with their skills and really lack in this area. I've coached many good ball players that just could not get into this mental toughness and would fold under pressure. They could perform well, shoot the lights out in practice when there was nothing on the line, but when it became game time and the competition started they had nothing to offer and failed.

I've witnessed many players with only average skills, but mentally tough, perform in ways no one thought they could perform. A great defensive play, an aggressive dribble, not folding under pressure these players get the job done. In fact, the greater the pressure, the better they perform with just average skills.

Developing mental toughness is also a reason that athletes need to be involved in a proper training program by the time they are going into middle school. A training program not only helps to build power, strength, and agility, but is important in developing mentally. Players should be accountable to the coach as well as the team. If you child's school program is lacking in this area consider also getting them involved with a travel team also. Find one that stresses this.

What is mental toughness? Here are the words that come to mind when I think of mental toughness: Self-confidence, Self-motivation, Can do, Focus, Concentration, Composure, Calmness, Poise, Self-control, Positive Energy, Determination, Persistence, Leadership

### **How can I develop mental toughness?**

One thing I've learned with experience is that mental toughness is sometimes part of the makeup of the individual and sometimes it is developed over time and exposure to adverse conditions. Preparation in mental toughness begins with experiences and coaching at a young age. Parents can play a key role to begin the process of training mental toughness, but they need help with this process. A disciplined educational system with high expectations, along with tough, but fair coaches with a strong mind set, is essential to developing a child mentally and building their self confidence.

To develop mental toughness the athlete must begin to practice attributes that lead to toughness. It is not an easy formula and it does take time. Parents, coaches, and other mentors must be consistently involved in this training process. Athletes who work on this attitude must apply it to all aspects of their competition, practice time and game time.

Whether we like it or not mental toughness takes failure and the ability to bounce back. So learning from the failure and the feelings associated will develop a tougher attitude. Too many times in our society we blame the coach, the referees, anyone but us. As many parents will agree it is easy to want to protect our children from taking the blame for their own poor performance. Mental toughness cannot be developed when we blame others. In fact, the opposite is the case. The athlete must understand this and step up.

Whenever the demands are the greatest is when the characteristics of mental toughness are the most evident. In my private sessions we talk allot about mental toughness, rising above the situation and being aggressive with the game.

**Visit our online store at [www.hoopzonebasketball.com/store](http://www.hoopzonebasketball.com/store)**