

# 16 MENTAL TOOLS FOR ATHLETES

@BEYONDBETTERCLUB



# BYND READY





# A MESSAGE FROM NATASHA

Elite performance isn't decided in one moment. It's shaped across many.

What you think before competition.  
How you respond during pressure.  
What you learn afterwards.

The ability to regulate your thoughts, manage emotion, and direct your attention under pressure often determines whether skill shows up when it matters.

This guide brings together 16 practical mental tools organised across three stages: Preparation, Performance, and Reflection.

Each tool is designed to be applied immediately and refined over time. You won't need all of them every day. The aim is to build awareness, strengthen control, and develop consistency across the full performance cycle.

Use this as a working resource.  
Test the tools. Refine them. Keep what works.

Progress is built in the details.





# PREPARATION

PREPARE LIKE A PRO



# 1) PERFORMANCE GOALS

## **How It Works:**

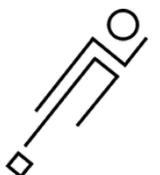
Performance goals direct your attention toward behaviours you can control rather than outcomes you cannot. When you focus on clear, specific actions, your mind becomes more task-oriented and less distracted by pressure, expectations, or results. This improves clarity, consistency, and confidence going into competition.

## **When to Use:**

Use performance goals before training and competition, especially if you find yourself thinking too much about results, selection, or external pressure. They are most effective when you need direction and structure in your preparation.

## **How to Use:**

Set 1–2 process goals that are specific and observable. For example: “Communicate early,” “Win first contact,” or “Reset quickly after mistakes.” Review them before you compete and between key moments.



## 2) IF-THEN PLANNING

### **How It Works:**

If-then planning prepares you for predictable challenges by deciding your response in advance. Instead of reacting emotionally in the moment, you follow a pre-set behavioural plan. This reduces hesitation and helps you stay composed when pressure increases.

### **When to Use:**

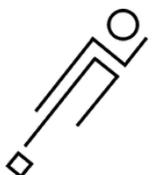
Use this before competition when you can anticipate common challenges — mistakes, tough opponents, nerves, or momentum shifts. It is particularly helpful if you know you tend to react emotionally under pressure.

### **How to Use:**

Complete the sentence:

“If \_\_\_ happens, then I will \_\_\_.”

Keep the response simple and behavioural. For example: “If I make a mistake, then I will take one breath and focus on the next play.”



# 3) VISUALISATION

## **How It Works:**

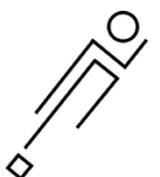
Visualisation helps you mentally rehearse situations before they happen. By imagining specific scenarios and seeing yourself respond effectively, you build familiarity and confidence. This reduces uncertainty and helps you feel prepared when those moments arise in real competition.

## **When to Use:**

Use visualisation before competition, during travel, or when building confidence after a setback. It is especially useful when preparing for high-pressure or unfamiliar situations.

## **How to Use:**

Visualise 1–2 realistic scenarios you are likely to face. See the environment clearly and imagine yourself executing well. Keep it focused and controlled for 2–3 minutes.



# 4) BREATHWORK

## **How It Works:**

Your breathing directly affects your physical and mental state. Longer exhales help reduce excessive tension and steady your body. When your state is more balanced, your focus sharpens and decision-making improves.

## **When to Use:**

Use this before competition if you feel overly tense or anxious. It is also helpful during warm-up if you need to settle your nerves and enter a composed state.

## **How to Use:**

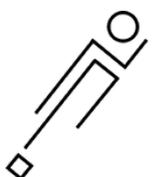
Inhale for 4 seconds.

Hold for 4 seconds.

Exhale for 6 seconds.

Repeat for 5–8 breaths.

Keep the breath smooth and controlled. Always make sure the exhale is longer than the inhale.



# 5) EVIDENCE-BASED THINKING

## **How It Works:**

Not every thought is accurate or useful. Thought challenging helps you step back from automatic reactions and assess them more logically. By examining the evidence and considering the consequences of certain thoughts, you reduce unnecessary doubt and regain control of your mindset.

## **When to Use:**

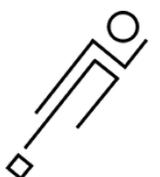
Use this when you notice negative assumptions, overthinking, or self-doubt before competition. It is especially helpful when your thoughts begin to increase tension or distract you from the task.

## **How to Use:**

Ask yourself:

- What evidence supports this thought?
- What evidence challenges it?
- Where will this thought get me?

Replace it with something realistic and helpful, not exaggerated confidence, just accurate and constructive thinking.





# PERFORMANCE

PERFORM LIKE A PRO



# 6) REFRAMING

## **How It Works:**

Pressure is not the problem, your interpretation of it is. When you see pressure as a threat, your body tightens and your thinking narrows. When you see it as a challenge, your energy becomes useful and your focus sharpens. Reframing shifts your mindset from fear to readiness.

## **When to Use:**

Use this before competition or during key moments when the stakes feel high. It's especially helpful when nerves start to feel overwhelming.

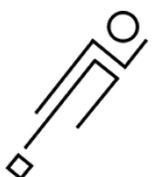
## **How to Use:**

When you notice pressure rising, tell yourself:

“This is my body getting ready.”

“This is a challenge I'm prepared for.”

Shift your focus toward what you can execute next.



# 7) INSTRUCTIONAL SELF-TALK

## **How It Works:**

Instructional self-talk is about giving your body clear, simple commands. Instead of thinking about outcomes, pressure, or distractions, you direct your attention to specific movements and actions. This reduces overthinking and keeps your focus on execution. The clearer the instruction, the easier it is for your body to follow under pressure.

## **When to Use:**

Use during competition, especially after mistakes, when your focus drifts, or when you catch yourself thinking about outcomes, opponents, or what's at stake.

## **How to Use:**

Choose 1–2 short cues that relate directly to movement or task execution, such as:

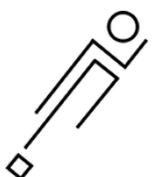
“Strong hands.”

“Low and quick.”

“Drive through.”

“Next play.”

Repeat them during resets and before key actions. Keep them short, specific, and linked to what your body needs to do next.



# 8) ATTENTIONAL CONTROL

## **How It Works:**

Your attention works like a spotlight, wherever you direct it, your performance follows. If it drifts to outcomes, past mistakes, opponents, or external noise, execution suffers. Controlling your spotlight means choosing where your focus goes instead of letting it wander.

You can direct your spotlight internally or externally. An internal focus targets your breathing, rhythm, or body position. This is useful when you feel overstimulated, rushed, or overwhelmed, as it helps you slow down and regain composure.

An external focus targets the ball, a teammate, space, or a tactical cue. This is often more effective for fluid movement and execution because it keeps your attention on the environment rather than over-controlling your body.

The key is knowing which one you need in the moment.

## **When to Use:**

Use this throughout competition, especially when distractions increase, momentum shifts, or your emotions spike.

## **How to Use:**

Choose a clear attentional target based on your state.

If you feel overloaded or anxious, narrow your spotlight internally to your breathing for a few seconds.

If you feel composed and ready to execute, shift your spotlight externally to the ball, space, or your tactical role.

When your mind drifts, deliberately bring your spotlight back to your chosen target.



# 9) THE 4 R'S MODEL

## **How It Works:**

Mistakes aren't the problem — your reaction is. Frustration, tension, or rushing can spill into the next play. The Four R's help you regain control quickly and move forward with intent.

## **When to Use:**

After errors or when you notice emotion rising — tight body, negative thoughts, loss of focus.

## **How to Use:**

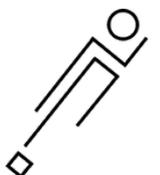
Recognise – Notice your reaction.

Reset – Take one controlled breath or release tension physically.

Refocus – Ask, "What's my next job?"

Respond – Execute the next action with commitment.

Recover fast. Compete forward.



# 10) PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTANCE

## **How It Works:**

The language you use shapes your state. Saying “I am nervous” makes the emotion feel like your identity. Saying “I am feeling nervous” creates separation. This small shift helps you see emotions as temporary experiences, not defining truths.

## **When to Use:**

Use during high-pressure moments when emotions feel intense or distracting.

## **How to Use:**

Replace identity-based language with experience-based language.

Instead of “I am anxious,” say “I am feeling anxious.”

Then return to your performance cue.



# 11) NAME IT TO TAME IT

## **How It Works:**

Once you've created distance from an emotion, the next step is to understand it. Labelling an emotion helps your brain organise what you're experiencing rather than letting it remain vague and overwhelming. When you clearly identify the emotion, it becomes something you can work with instead of something that controls you.

## **When to Use:**

Use this when you notice a strong emotional response that keeps returning or influencing your behaviour, frustration, anger, fear, disappointment.

## **How to Use:**

Name the emotion clearly:

"This is frustration."

"This is anger."

Then briefly get curious:

"What triggered this?"

"What is this emotion trying to tell me?"

Acknowledge it without judgment, then choose your next action deliberately.



# 12) CONTROLLED RELEASE

## **How It Works:**

Emotions like frustration, stress, or anger don't disappear just because you ignore them. If you suppress them, they often linger and leak into your performance. Controlled release gives you a brief, deliberate window to feel and express the emotion — without letting it take over.

## **When to Use:**

During competition when you feel frustration building, tension rising, or stress starting to affect your focus.

## **How to Use:**

Give yourself 15–20 seconds.

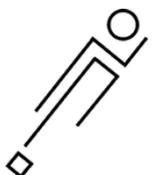
Acknowledge the emotion.

Express it safely (strong breath out, brief physical release, short verbal cue).

Then close the window.

Shift your focus to your next task and move forward.

Feel it. Contain it. Compete on.





# REFLECTION

BE A PRO



# 13) HOT DEBRIEF

## **How It Works:**

Emotions like frustration, stress, or anger don't disappear just because you ignore them. If you suppress them, they often linger and leak into your performance. Controlled release gives you a brief, deliberate window to feel and express the emotion — without letting it take over.

## **When to Use:**

During competition when you feel frustration building, tension rising, or stress starting to affect your focus.

## **How to Use:**

Give yourself 15–20 seconds.

Acknowledge the emotion.

Express it safely (strong breath out, brief physical release, short verbal cue).

Then close the window.

Shift your focus to your next task and move forward.

Feel it. Contain it. Compete on.



# 14) FRIENDLY FEEDBACK

## **How It Works:**

Others often see patterns in your behaviour that you miss yourself. Peer feedback adds perspective and helps you compare your view of performance with someone else's observation.

## **When to Use:**

After competition or key training sessions when a teammate has observed your performance.

## **How to Use:**

Ask for:

One thing I did well.

One thing to improve.

One suggestion for next time.

Record it and choose one clear adjustment.



# 14) IDENTITY-BASED REFLECTION

## **How It Works:**

Performance is shaped by the standards you hold yourself to. Identity-based reflection focuses less on results and more on the type of athlete you are reinforcing through your behaviour.

Over time, repeated actions shape identity. If your behaviours consistently align with your standards, performance becomes more stable and intentional.

## **When to Use:**

After performances where your discipline, effort, composure, or leadership were tested — especially in high-pressure or challenging moments.

## **How to Use:**

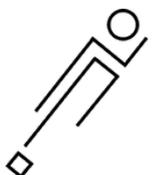
Ask yourself:

Did I live my standards today?

Where did I compromise them?

What behaviour will strengthen the athlete I'm becoming next time?

Focus on one clear behavioural adjustment that reinforces your identity.



# 15) SOCRATIC QUESTIONING

## **How It Works:**

Socratic questioning helps you dig beneath surface explanations. Instead of stopping at “I just didn’t play well,” it pushes you to explore deeper causes, alternative perspectives, and missed factors. It slows down emotional reactions and strengthens your ability to think clearly about performance.

## **When to Use:**

After a confusing performance, a setback you can’t fully explain, or when your first reaction feels too simple or emotionally driven.

## **How to Use:**

Ask yourself:

What else could explain this?

What factor did I overlook?

If I viewed this as a learning opportunity, what would I focus on?

What would a neutral observer say happened?

Use the answers to identify one practical adjustment for next time.



# 16) 360 REFLECTION

## **How It Works:**

Performance is shaped by the standards you hold yourself to. Identity-based reflection focuses less on results and more on the type of athlete you are reinforcing through your behaviour.

Over time, repeated actions shape identity. If your behaviours consistently align with your standards, performance becomes more stable and intentional.

## **When to Use:**

After performances where your discipline, effort, composure, or leadership were tested, especially in high-pressure or challenging moments.

## **How to Use:**

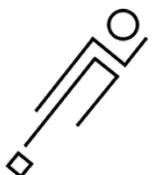
Ask yourself:

Did I live my standards today?

Where did I compromise them?

What behaviour will strengthen the athlete I'm becoming next time?

Focus on one clear behavioural adjustment that reinforces your identity.





# THANK YOU

Growth, development, and long-term success are built intentionally. When you become deliberate about how you prepare, how you perform, and how you reflect, you begin to take control of your development rather than leaving it to chance. Small, consistent adjustments at each stage of the cycle compound over time.

This is about building a system that works for you, one that plays to your strengths and helps you meet the demands of competition with clarity and control.

That's where performance coaching becomes powerful.

Having structure, accountability, and expert guidance accelerates that process.

If you're interested in working together as part of a performance cohort, **register your interest** and take the next step to better performance.

Keep building,

*Natasha*

