

The only thing we have to fear

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Butterflies: that feeling in your gut just this side of nauseous. The harder you try to kill them the harder their wings flap. The cause is diverted blood flow away from the digestive system. Less blood causes oxygen deprivation resulting in a fluttery feeling. Other symptoms of fear include increased heart rate, sweating, shakes, dry mouth and an overwhelming need to go to the bathroom. Fear is a primal reaction setting off a chain of physiological events. Blood and oxygen is pulled from non-essential areas into large muscle groups. Pain response is suppressed. Adrenaline is released into the body. Fighters may hate the word fear; but that is exactly what those pre-fight jitters are; the physiology of fear.

The first opponent to be faced in any fight is fear. Cus D'Amato was one of the world's most insightful boxing coaches. Cus understood that fear can make your opponent far better, far more dangerous than they really are. D'Amato talking about a fighter's fear

“...as the fighter walks toward the ring, his feet want to walk in the opposite direction. He's asking himself how he got into this mess. He climbs the stairs into the ring, and it's like going to the guillotine. Maybe he looks at the other fighter, and sees by the way he's loosening up that his opponent is experienced, strong, very confident. Then when the opponent takes off his robe, he's got big bulging muscles. What the fighter has to realize is that he's got exactly the same effect on his opponent, only he doesn't know it.”

Beyond fear of an opponent is fear of the ring itself. Fighters are the most exposed athletes in the world. Denied even modest anonymity provided by a uniform; the fighter is laid bare. Stage fright compounded by the fact that the other actor in the play is trying to knock you out.

Fighters fear losing, not just losing a fight but also losing their spot. They fear letting down their coach, disappointing fans and failing their teammates. Other elements come into play and raise the stakes such as money, time, fame, and your Mamma sitting front row. Combining all these things with some monster on the other side of the ring who plans to make his bones on yours. This is a fighter's burden. So how do you keep those prefight jitters from shaking you apart?

Understand your body: What fighter's experience is a physiological. Understanding what your body is doing will allow you to rationalize your feelings and better deal with the effects.

Create a ritual: Coping mechanisms vary widely from fighter to fighter. Some listen to music, others scream, hit pads, and a few sleep. The sleepers are the really dangerous ones. Create for yourself a ritual that focuses your energy. Something that allows you to concentrate on anything but being nervous..

Positive Visualization. Visualization is an important aspect of all training. Right before a fight visualization can help calm and focus a fighter. Some visualize how the fight would go but I suggest just visualize winning. See yourself with your hand raised, giving a post fight interview and that smile on your Mamma's face. See yourself winning; see yourself win.

Be well prepared: If you are nervous because you did not train hard; you deserve to be nervous.

Remember to breathe and drink lots of water. Increased breathing and sweating will dehydrate you quickly.

Eat Smart: Foods high in potassium like bananas will help calm the butterflies in your stomach. Foods hard to digest such as milk products will tax your digestive system while it is being deprived of oxygen.

Use that nervous energy: Your nerves (adrenaline) can give you energy, strength and speed. Fear makes you sharp, determined. If it does not overwhelm you it will make you stronger.

Don't fear losing: Some fighters think the fear of losing will keep them from failing. Truth is fear of losing is no where near as effective as the desire to win. Stay positive in thoughts and action.

Remember your fear symptoms don't show. Your opponent can't see the butterflies in your gut or hear your heart pound. They are afraid of you too; go justify their fears.

“Take not the console of your fears”
General George Patton