

10-MINUTE PREGAME PREP: 8 MENTAL GAME LESSONS FOR YOUNG ATHLETES

AUDIO & PARENT MANUAL



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WELCOME

Parents - Start Here



Welcome to "10-Minute Pregame Prep: 8 Mental Toughness Lessons for Young Athletes." This audio and eBook program is designed to give you and your athletes an efficient and simple way to improve mental game skills.

The objective of this program is to help your kids boost their mental game before competition—during their pregame prep—when the mental game is the most critical. Better yet, it will only take your kids ten minutes to listen to each lesson

before they compete. We provide them with the most important information they need to help improve their mental toughness.

How to Use 10-Minute Pregame Prep

The Parents' Manual is designed to help you understand the mental game lessons we teach your kids. We also provide tips to help you support your athletes' mental game before and after competition. You'll want to read Parents' Manual 1 on the same week your athletes listen to Lesson 1 Audio Program.

You'll find four tools in this program to help you and your kids with pregame mental preparation.

These include:

1. Eight audio lessons, each 10-minutes covering a different lesson, of pregame tips for kids.
2. Summary cheat sheet for kids to quickly review each lesson.
3. A post-game discussion questions or test to gauge mental skills improvement (called post-competition assessment).
4. Pre-game mental rehearsal program

Please ask your athletes to listen to at least one pregame mental prep lesson each week.

Ideally, each week your athletes will listen to one pregame audio lesson before practice and competition. In addition, you'll want to read your Parents' Manual related to that same audio lesson (all lessons are numbered from 1-8). We've provided post-game follow up questions (or post-competition assessment) so you can communicate with your athletes about what they've learned and how they can continue to improve.

Please ask your athletes to listen to at least one pregame mental prep lesson each week. Start the program with Lesson 1 and progress to Lesson 8. Also, you'll want your athletes to review all pregame lessons during their season.

Your athletes can also use the "summary sheets" we provided for each lesson to quickly review the concepts. The summary sheets are only a snapshot of what they learn in the audio program and can serve as quick reminders. They should listen to the audio program first and then use the summary sheets as a review.

In addition, we've provided post-game discussion questions or assessment for each lesson that helps you and your athletes measure progress and continue to work on their mental game areas that need to be improved. You'll want your athletes to complete the post-competition assessment the same day as competition or scrimmages.

LESSON 1

Managing Kids' Expectations



What You Need to Know

Be mindful of how you might harbor high expectations for your kids, parents. Understanding the effects of high expectations is one of the most important things you can do to help your sports kids before a game. It's the focus of this lesson. Here's why: Just before a game, parents try to be helpful and boost kids' confidence. But this can backfire because they express their expectations to kids in

ways that cause kids to take these expectations on as their own. But your athletes' ideas of how they SHOULD perform are already causing too much pressure!

Expectations are unwritten demands your athletes have about their performance. Athletes with high expectations think they should make five three-point shots, or be the top scorer on the team. Truth is, these high expectations, even though they may sound like good ideas, can hurt kids' confidence.

That's because it's easy for athletes to become frustrated or lose confidence if they don't meet their—or your—expectations. Here's an example: A softball player expects to be a perfect pitcher. In fact, in the past, she's had many good pitching games. But when she makes a few mistakes and fails to be "perfect" in a game, she gets frustrated, loses her composure and starts to give up.

If she didn't have these high expectations, the pitcher would likely enjoy sports more, keep her cool, and perform better.

How do you fit in as the sports parent? The truth is, your athletes often sense or understand only too well what parents expect of them.

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You may not exactly say, just before a game, "Go out there and make five three-point shots or score 20 points!" But maybe you've suggested your child should score all these points while you're chatting after a game, at the dinner table, or while you're driving to the game.

And even if you think your sports kids weren't paying attention and didn't feel pressured by your suggestions, believe us, they did!

In this sports parent eBook, we're going to help you identify the high expectations you might have for your kids and suggest ways to help you and your sports kids manage these expectations.

Managing Your Expectations for Young Athletes

Before a game, it's critical for you to manage your own expectations about what you think should or shouldn't happen during an upcoming game. You can also help your young athletes manage their expectations.

You must understand that kids' mental games are just as important, if not more important, than their physical game in youth sports. That's true of kids, teens, adults and professional athletes.



When athletes feel confident, they're able to make the most of their physical abilities. Confidence plays a huge role in whether kids enjoy sports, learn, grow, and perform well. And high expectations can really bust kids' confidence, as we mentioned above.

By the way, your kids often feel loads of pressure to live up to your expectations, which can cause them to tighten up or play tentatively during a game.

We have a tried-and-true strategy for managing kids' pregame expectations. You, as parents, play a role in determining how well our strategy helps young athletes. Here's what the strategy looks like:

First, kids need to understand the problems with holding high expectations and then identify their expectations. Second, they need to replace them with achievable "mini-goals" and focus on feeling confident.

Kids need to understand the problems with holding high expectations and then identify their expectations.

In our athlete's pre-game audio, we teach your kids how to do this. Here we want to explain how and where you fit into the plan.

Like your sports kids, you should identify the pregame expectations you have for your athletes. You may have unspoken—or spoken—expectations about how you want your kids to perform.

What do you expect of your kids' performance or outcome of a competition?

- Do you feel as though your kids should be the star or leading scorer of the team?
- Do you feel your athletes should not make any mistakes or limit mistakes?
- Do you feel that your kids need you to boost their confidence before competitions?
- Do you harbor superstitions about your kids' wins? For example, do you feel they must do certain things—like eat a granola bar—to get ready for a game if they want to perform well?
- Do you think that if you're not present during a game or competition, your child is more likely to perform poorly?
- Do you feel as if your athletes shouldn't make any mistakes?

- Do you want your kids to impress the other parents by being stars?
- Do you bring relatives and friends to your kids' game in the hope that your young athletes will impress them?
- Do you have specific expectations about how many points your kids should make, or how many shots they should block?
- Do you want your sports kids to be "perfect" pitchers or quarterbacks or point guards?
- Do you expect your athletes to always perform as well as they did during their best game or performance?

If you answer yes to many of these questions, you probably need to take a step back. There's a fine balance between being supportive and placing high expectations on your athletes about performance.

Note: They often internalize your expectations, for them, as their own. And if you pay a lot of money for training and travel, kids naturally think you expect them to

pay it back by performing well all the time (even if you don't).



Their thinking might go something like this, "My parents are putting so much time, money, and energy into buying uniforms, managing the

schedule, taking us to games, and organizing training. I need to perform well for them."

Here's the deal about your expectations: Even if you try to keep these ideas to yourself, your kids will likely sense that you have high expectations for them. Trust us! They'll see it in your face and your body language—before, during and after games.

And if you verbalize these types of expectations, your kids will likely take these expectations on as their own. In other words, if you tell them, "Don't make the same mistakes you did last time," they'll likely tell themselves, "I should have a perfect game today. I can't make any mistakes or my parents will feel disappointed in me."

And what do these high expectations lead to?

When kids can't do what they set out to do in their minds, they get frustrated and upset.

As we have mentioned, they often lead to frustration. When kids can't do what they set out to do in their minds, they get frustrated and upset. As a result, they can lose their composure, have temper tantrums, give up, or start playing safe.

You don't want your sports kids to do any of these things!

Here are some examples of young athletes' high expectations:

- About results: "I should win the tennis match 6-0, 6-0."
- About statistics: "I need to hit at least 2 for 4 at the plate today."
- About performance: "I should never miss a short putt."
- About being perfect: "I can't make any mistakes in the game today."
- From teammates: "My teammates expect me to score every game."
- From coaches: "Coach expects me to swim a PB every time."

- From parents: "My parents expect me to be the top scorer on the team."
- From past results: "I should win the match today."

A Better Option Than Expectations

Okay, we've identified high expectations—demands about their performance that your kids may have adopted from you or heaped on themselves.

Instead, you want your sports kids to focus on smaller, achievable goals. We call these *mini-goals*.

You can help your kids most with this task by understanding why it's so important for them to focus on something other than their high expectations.



Here's the deal: When kids concentrate on their high expectations, their minds are focused on outcomes and their own judgments about their performance. They're thinking about how many points they want to score, but not on the tasks required to play or perform well. Instead, they should focus on their roles—related to their position—that will help them stay grounded in the here and now.

You want them to concentrate on the process, not on the score or win. To do this, we ask sports kids to begin by writing down their common expectations to help them raise their awareness of the expectations. You as sports parents should also write down your expectations for your kids.

It's possible you've never thought of your expectations as anything but a positive influence on your athletes. You probably thought you were encouraging and motivating your athletes by suggesting they be top scorers or high rebounders or great putters. That's understandable; it's a common trap parents naturally fall into.

Step two in our strategy is to replace expectations with mini-goals. These are smaller, easier-to-realize goals that help kids focus on the process. So, instead of telling children and teens to score five soccer goals, you might help them come up with some mini-goals (that can lead to scoring goals). You want to let them establish these goals themselves, but of course you might make some suggestions if they're looking for help.

You want them to concentrate on the process, not on the score or win. Focusing on mini-goals helps kids stop judging and criticizing themselves for failing to meet their high expectations. When kids judge themselves like this, it undermines their confidence. We'll give you examples of mini-goals below.

Step 3 of our strategy is for kids to fill their heads with thoughts that boost their confidence, instead of thinking of their high expectations. Confidence is an athlete's belief in their ability to perform a task—for example, making a good pass to a teammate. When kids feel confident, they are not judgmental about how well or poorly they are playing. Their confidence grows with the momentum of playing well. It's focused on the moment and the athletes' ability to get the job done right now,



instead of on the desire to score a given number of points or hit .350 at the plate. And confidence is built on months and years of training and past performances.

In other words, pure confidence doesn't have anything to do with expectations. Confidence is all about kids believing in themselves, their preparation, and their training. In lesson 3, you'll learn more about how to help kids feel confident in sports.

What to do Today Before The Game

Following our strategy, you and your young athletes have likely identified their expectations and your expectations for them. You need to help athletes replace their expectations with mini-goals.

Here are some examples of the mini-goals we've been discussing:

- In golf, kids could pick a specific target for every shot or swing freely.
- In tennis, athletes could focus on visualizing their serve or getting more first-serve in.
- In hockey, they could concentrate on back checking well or being more decisive.

The point is to focus on a smaller part of their game that grounds them in the moment and in the process of playing—not on the score, stats, or win. Meanwhile,

you should focus on letting go of the expectations you likely have held for some time about how your kids should perform.

This may not be easy for you initially: this requires you to think in different ways. In addition, it's not a bad idea for you to talk to your kids about the expectations you've communicated to them in the past.

You could say something like, "Hey, I might have said some things that cause you to feel pressure, such as, 'Go out there and be the top scorer,' or 'I want you to be as great as you were last game.' I learned that instead of helping you feel confident, saying these things can possibly lead you to feel frustrated and upset and can hurt your confidence in sports. What do you think?"

The point is to focus on a smaller part of their game that grounds them in the moment and in the process of playing.

You could even ask your athletes to help you by pointing out when you're pressuring them with high expectations.

Once you've resolved to let go of your own expectations for your kids, the focus should turn to establishing mini-goals.

The mini-goals that we want you and your young athletes to focus on just before a game are smaller objectives very specific to their sport and role or position. In order to establish them, they need to ask themselves what they

should concentrate on that helps them perform the tasks they're supposed to perform in their position.

Keep in mind that your athletes' mini-goals are specific to their sport and a task within each sport.

Here are a few examples:

- Golf: Putting – Pick a line and commit to it.
- Tennis: Serving – Visualize/rehearse a good serve.
- Soccer: Goalie – Communicate with teammates.
- Swimming: 100 Free – Focus on breathing pattern.

If they want your help, you might help them identify some mini-goals that can work well for them. However, keep in mind that if you do all the work—meaning you identify the mini-goals and tell them what they should be doing—it might turn into another type of pressure and expectation.

You have to walk a fine line between helping your sports kids and pressuring them. It's best if you follow their lead.

**Athletes' mini-goals might include:**

- Mental preparation skills – including visualizing themselves performing their tasks well, committing to a plan, or using positive self-talk.
- Physical preparation – getting prepared on the blocks, warming up before a game, stretching prior to competition.
- Game strategy – their role or plan for the play, race or match.

- Anything that athletes should focus on that will help them perform the tasks they need to do in their position.

Again, the idea is for your kids to feel grounded in the process of playing, not to focus on expectations.

The idea is for your kids to feel grounded in the process of playing, not to focus on expectations.

While you're being mindful of how you might instill high expectations for your athletes and helping your sports kids let go of theirs, remind them how they can feel confident. We'll talk more about this in another pregame lesson, but for now, keep these thoughts in mind:

How can sports kids feel more confident for today's game?

They can:

- Think about what they've been doing well in practice this week—but they should avoid turning these positive experiences into high expectations!
- Focus on their strengths as athletes. These include mental-game strengths. Are they great communicators, kids who perform well under pressure or kids who know how to focus under pressure?
- Use positive-self talk before the game. This means that their thoughts about how they have performed in the past and will perform in the future should be positive. They should not tell themselves, "I'm too small to beat that big guy," or other negative thoughts.
- Believe they can do well without telling themselves they **MUST** do well or **HAVE** to do well. They might simply visualize themselves performing well to boost this belief.

What to Do Today

Today, just before your young athletes' game or performance, you should let go of any expectations about how your athletes should perform or what should happen.

Focus on choosing your words very carefully. Often, sports parents want to say SOMETHING that's supportive and loving. They end up saying things like, "Play better than you ever have before," or, "Go out there and win!" or, "Don't miss those shots on goal!"

But as we have mentioned, such statements mostly make your kids raise their expectations—and ultimately can make them feel frustrated. We understand that you want to show that you're behind your athletes 100 percent, but you might want to stick to the simple phrase, "Focus on the process."

It's also important to understand what your athletes should be focusing on in their mini-goals.

Rather than a high expectation like, "I'm going to make every touch perfect," a mini-goal should be more manageable, something like, "Focus on creating space and communicating with my teammates."



Along with letting go of high expectations and focusing on mini-goals, kids should be focusing on taking full control of their confidence. Remember confidence must come from within your athletes, not from others.

Again, here's where you come in...

Be mindful of how you communicate with your athletes before the game so you

avoid raising your kids' expectations! Again, parents walk a fine line between being positive and enthusiastic and imposing expectations on their kids.

Remember confidence must come from within your athletes, not from others.

To feel confident, sports kids need to believe in their abilities, their team and their training. It's your job to help them feel SELF-confident—not to rattle them with negative statements, over-coaching, or by comparing your team to the huge, impossible-to-beat opposing team.

Today's Pregame Tips

Kids need to focus on playing for themselves—not playing to meet others' expectations, especially their parents'. Just before a game, parents need to avoid instilling high expectations in athletes.

Keep in mind that kids need to focus on mini-goals based on the position they play.

You might discuss these goals with them if they ask you to help, but mostly you should let them choose their mini-goals.

By focusing on mini-goals, kids are more grounded in the moment and not concentrating on the score or win. When you talk to them just before a game, avoid chatting about outcomes like the score or win.

At first, it may feel hard for you to avoid instilling expectations in your athlete. But by identifying and eliminating expectations, you're helping your young athlete in sports—and life. We're sure you'll see improvements from this approach—once you better understand how expectations undermine kids' experience in athletics.

Please refer to the document “Start Here” for directions on how to get the most out of this program.

