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Tigers Must Think “WIN”

“Wait a minute, Dr. Eddie!?! You always say NOT to focus on winning. You say we should think about our job and the process of playing. Did you change your mind?”

No, I haven't. Especially in big games, like the one the Tigers have tomorrow against the Minnesota Twins, when there is added pressure to win. After 162 games, the Tigers whole season comes down to one game. Win or go home. The tendency is to focus on the desired outcome. And the distraction of the score can interfere with your performance – especially after a mistake or in a tight contest.

That's why you have to **think “WIN” ... What's Important Now?**

Dr. Sarah Naylor Castillo successfully applies this focus with her athletes at West Point. She shared this technique with us at the Association for Applied Sport Psychology Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah a few weeks ago.

First, you have to know what it takes to win the game. What is your strategy? What mental skills need to be used? What do you pay attention to? What has to happen when you're losing? At every moment of the game, there is one best thing that you should be thinking and one best thing you should be doing. The quicker you can identify and do that – the better you will perform (and the more likely you are to win).

Applying WIN:

At every break in the action or change of possession, ask yourself “What's important now?” In basketball, hockey and soccer - do it at each turnover, after each missed and made shot. In football, ask yourself before every snap and in golf between each shot. In baseball, step out of the box and WIN after every pitch or defensively after every error, base hit, stolen base, etc.

Your focus should be a brief and specific action. It may be “keep my hands up” (basketball), “hit low” (football), “focus on the pitcher's release” (baseball), “hustle!” (soccer), or “control my emotions” (hockey, golf and many other sports). You know what's important now. If you don't, get with your coach and ask what the best focus and strategy is at that moment.

This type of focus isn't common or easy, but it is essential to mental toughness. Start by using WIN in practice as described above. You'll notice that over time (with consistent practice), you'll set your goals more quickly and be able to integrate this type of focus in games with improved performance.