



Performance Excellence Center

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Tournament Tough

The NCAA Tournament is championship like no other and excites fans across the country. School pride is at an all time high and the national attention can be intense. Established programs deal with the expectations of winning it all while bubble teams try to balance the joy of making the tournament while remaining grounded in the work they have ahead. But whether your team is a favorite to go to the Final Four or a Cinderella team looking to make a run, the keys to winning are the same:

Don't get caught up in the rankings

Upsets happen all the time. The Final Four rarely hosts all four top ranked seeds. Rankings are largely opinions, and it does a team no good to get caught up in them because they are largely meaningless. The only thing that matters is what happens on the court. Keep your focus there.

Focus on what you can control

Rankings are one thing you can't control. A team that is upset about their seed or concerned about the fairness of the schedule will be at a disadvantage. Other distractions that can take a player's focus away from what is essential are poor officiating, the venue, and crowd reactions. Teams will perform better when they control the things they can: their own thoughts, feelings and behaviors. How you react to adversity is much more important than the issue itself.

Mentally tough teams rebound from mistakes with hope and optimism

Mistakes will happen. Tough teams will let the mistake go and focus on the next play. They stay focused on what they can do to succeed until the clock reads 0:00. Weaker teams will let their frustration show in their body language (for example, head down, slumped shoulders, yelling at teammates, play with low energy). Not only does this put you at a competitive disadvantage, but it sends your opponent the message that you're mentally defeated and raises their confidence. Double trouble!

Enjoy the pressure

Mentally tough teams see each match-up as a challenge and are excited to push themselves to new heights of greatness. Weaker teams see pressure as a threat and focus on the consequences of a loss. This leads to more timid play as they try to avoid mistakes. You can't win a championship that way.

Confidence is key

Mentally tough teams did their work all season – they conditioned in the pre-season, practiced with intensity throughout the season, and learned from their mistakes in games. There is no better way to build confidence than to be prepared. Teams that have been giving 100% and practicing the mental toughness skills above will have a confidence that won't be shaken by a temporary scoring slump or a brief lapse in defense. They will believe in the work they've done and play their way out of it, regardless of the score or the opponent.

... as you watch the games, look for these traits in the winners. And good luck with your brackets!