



MANAGING COMPETITION ANXIETY



WELCOME

Welcome to Basketball Otago's resource dedicated to managing competition anxiety. In this document we aim to provide you with a roadmap to navigate the psychological challenges inherent in competitive basketball, empowering you to optimise your performance on the court.

We consider "Consistent Performer" to be a pivotal trait in successful Otago basketball players, as detailed in our Player Growth Guidebook. This quality entails mental resilience, a fearless approach to pivotal moments and the ability to deliver consistently under pressure. Our aim with this resource is to lay the groundwork for nurturing this essential attribute.

We will begin by dissecting the anatomy of performance anxiety and explore its various manifestations and underlying causes. From pre-game nerves that grip us in anticipation to the self doubt that creeps in during critical moments, we'll unravel the complexities of anxiety and equip you with the knowledge to recognise and address it head on.

Moving forward, we'll delve into a diverse array of proven strategies and techniques designed to cultivate mental resilience and enhance your performance while under pressure. Whether you're seeking practical exercises to sharpen your focus, mindfulness techniques to stay present in the moment or confidence building rituals, we've got you covered.

So, whether you're striving to sink that game-winning shot, orchestrate a seamless defensive strategy or simply elevate your overall performance to new heights, join us as we embark on a transformative journey to unlock your full potential on the basketball court. It's time to silence the noise, harness your inner strength and rise above the competition as you take control of your mental game and unleash the athlete within. Welcome to your roadmap to peak mental performance.

Will Hopper

Pathway Development Manager



COMPETITION ANXIETY

The rush of adrenaline before a big game is unparalleled, but what if it begins to overwhelm you? Nervousness is a natural part of sports, but when it starts to affect your performance it warrants a closer examination as you may be grappling with competition anxiety.

When the pressure of competition mounts, it can feel as though our bodies are operating independently from our minds; our thoughts scatter, our stomach churns and maintaining focus becomes a difficult task. Though deep down we may recognise it as anxiety, regaining composure and quelling those anxious feelings can prove challenging.

Rest assured, you're not alone in experiencing these sensations. Many athletes contend with competition anxiety. Yet, if left unchecked, it can significantly disrupt our performance and even diminish our enthusiasm for the sport altogether - something that nobody wants.

SIGNS OF COMPETITION ANXIETY

Players can experience competition anxiety for a variety of reasons, such as:

- Pressure to win or perform well
- Unrealistic expectations set by themselves, coaches, parents or peers
- Trying to impress coaches, parents or peers

Those who experience competition anxiety may display one or more of the following signs:

- Intense feelings of worry and fear
- Physical symptoms like sweaty palms, increased heart rate, shortness of breath, upset stomach, muscle tension or headaches
- Engaging in negative self talk
- Difficulty concentrating or focusing on a task
- Overthinking or racing thoughts

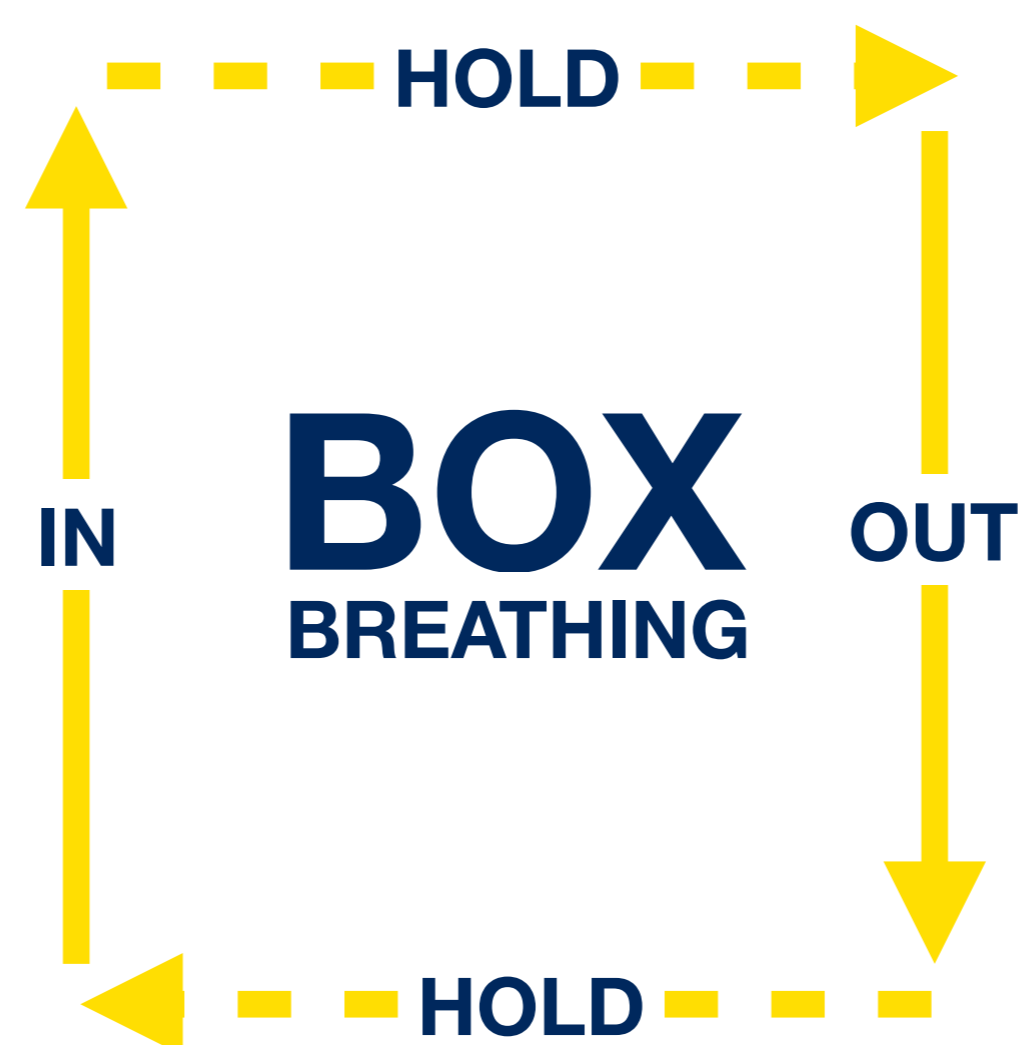
TIPS FOR MANAGING COMPETITION ANXIETY

Now that you're familiar with what competition anxiety entails and how to recognise it, let's delve into effective methods for handling it. It's crucial to acknowledge that there's no universal solution and what proves effective for one individual might not necessarily yield the same results for you. Therefore, don't be disheartened if a particular technique doesn't resonate with you. Stay open to experimenting with different approaches until you discover what suits you best.

DEEP BREATHING

While it may seem trivial, the act of breathing holds significant power in handling stress and anxiety associated with competition. Engaging in deep breathing exercises can effectively reduce your heart rate, declutter your thoughts and ground you in the present moment. Dedicate a few moments to concentrate on your breath, inhaling deeply through your nose and exhaling slowly through your mouth.

One exercise is "Box Breathing". Breathe in through your nose while counting to four in your head. Imagine drawing a line up one side of a box as you inhale. Hold your breath for four seconds, drawing a line across the top of the box. Breathe out through your mouth for a count of four, drawing a line down the other side of the box. Hold your breath for another four seconds and complete the last line across the bottom of the box. Repeat this process until you feel calm and relaxed.



POSITIVE SELF TALK

Crafting and reciting mantras and affirmations can wield considerable influence over your performance. Discovering a phrase or expression that deeply resonates with you can provide that additional surge of confidence necessary for triumph.

Incorporate them into your routine consistently, particularly during instances of self-doubt or tension, and observe how they can foster a positive shift in your mindset and enhance your performance. Here are a few suggestions to explore:

- I am focused, determined and in control over my performance
- I am fully present in this moment and ready to perform my best

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

Muscles can become tight and tense when in high-pressure situations. Tight muscles not only hinder your performance but also increase the risk of injury during a game. Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) is a technique used by many athletes to alleviate stress-induced muscle tension.

Think of it as a brief workout for your muscles, focusing not on building strength but on releasing tension and stiffness. The beauty of PMR is its versatility - you can practice it anywhere, even in the locker room before a game.

Begin by deliberately tensing your feet, holding for a few seconds and then gently releasing. Progress to your legs, stomach, arms, shoulders and even your facial muscles. With consistent practice you'll develop a heightened awareness of your body, leading to enhanced performance and greater confidence on the court.



ESTABLISH A ROUTINE

Developing a pre-competition ritual can significantly aid athletes grappling with competition anxiety. By establishing a routine that exudes familiarity and predictability, you can effectively manage nerves and cultivate a sense of readiness - both mentally and physically.

Your routine should be tailored to your individual preferences, instilling confidence and a sense of preparedness. For instance, you might adhere to a specific warm-up regimen, immerse yourself in a favourite song or playlist, or partake in a calming breathing exercise. The key lies in identifying what resonates most with you.

Once you've pinpointed a ritual that resonates, integrate it into your routine and adhere to it consistently.

BUILD A SUPPORT NETWORK

Seeking support from your network - be it family, friends, coaches or teammates - can be invaluable in navigating competition anxiety. Simply opening up about your feelings can wield significant impact. These individuals may have encountered similar challenges and can provide guidance, reassurance or simply lend a sympathetic ear.

Furthermore, don't overlook external resources in managing competition anxiety. Professionals and mindset coaches can offer valuable insights and strategies beyond your immediate circle of support. Remember you're not alone and there are numerous avenues available to help you effectively address and overcome competition-related stress and anxiety.



SUMMARY

We trust that the insights we've provided serve as a beneficial launching pad for your journey toward conquering competition anxiety. Understand that setbacks are an inherent aspect of this process, so maintain your resolve even if you don't witness instant progress.

Remember that it is all about finding what works best for you. You are an individual and what might work well for others may not necessarily be the best strategy for you.

With persistence and a positive outlook, you can master the art of managing anxiety and return to excelling in your endeavours. Continuously explore new techniques, seek assistance when needed, and, most importantly, show yourself compassion along the way. You're fully capable of overcoming this challenge—believe in yourself!



