



Sustaining Optimum Performance DNA of a STUDENT-ATHLETE

by William Jurgens

WELLNESS

Nutrition—Ensure you have proper nutrition to meet requirements for optimum performance during practice and competition. Take the time to learn more about the importance of nutrition, and plan to meet your nutritional needs accordingly.

Emotional Intelligence—Emotional intelligence skills can be learned and are considered advantageous for successful leadership. The foundation of emotional intelligence is self-awareness, which means you have a greater understanding of yourself including how you will react to situations and mood swings. Improved self-awareness leads to improved self-control and the ability to self-regulate your responses and reactions to situations. Other important aspects of emotional intelligence include motivation, empathy and social skills. [4]

Irrational Core Values—Try to eliminate the unrealistic demands you place on yourself and others. Don't expect people you know to always treat you with kindness and fairness, and don't always expect to get what you want. [2]

Structured Environment—You have the time to get done at a high level all your required tasks if you structure your time (time management). Prioritize your tasks and concentrate the effort to get the job accomplished at a high level and on time.

Mental Health—Student-athletes should treat their mental health issues the same as their physical health concerns by talking to their friends, coaches, athletic trainers and mental health professionals; this support group cares about you and wants to help you get the professional attention you need and be with you during your recovery.

Physical Health—Maintaining your physical health should always be a priority for you. Injuries and sickness are common occurrences for student athletes. Seeking professional guidance and treatment through your coaches and athletic trainers accelerates your return to normal activity.

Mentally Strong—Dr. Jim Bauman, a sports psychology consultant, says that athletes should emphasize being resilient, pliable and adaptable more than being tough. [5]

Sleep—Sleep is essential for your body to recover physically and mentally. Student athletes need 8-10 hours to fully recover. Though demands make it difficult at times to get all the rest you need, prioritizing sleep will help you plan better for this essential ingredient to achieving sustainable optimum performance.

Well-Being—Tom Rath and Jim Harter have identified five elements that contribute to our overall well-being: career, social, financial, physical and community. Any one of these elements not doing well will affect your overall well-being. [1]

Core Values—Develop core values, e.g., respect, accountability, discipline, commitment, leadership, helping those who can't help themselves, always do what is right, caring for others and honesty. These core values guide you in your decision making and make a difference in how you lead your life and conduct your business.

Communications—Communications is one of the most important leadership qualities required for success. Your first line of communicating any questions or concerns should be with your head or assistant coach; either should welcome the opportunity to talk to you at the appropriate time. You should also realize that there are many athletics staff members who are available to assist you with any concerns you may have.

Physical Health

Mental Health

Mentally Strong

Sleep

Well-Being

Core Values

Communications

Good Attitude

Attitude

Ability is what you're capable of doing. Motivation determines what you do. Attitude determines how well you do it.

—Lou Holtz

A good attitude will lead you to opportunities you didn't know existed. It will help you feel better about yourself and promote a healthy perspective on life and the quality of your relationships.

Confidence

Mental Toughness

Focus

Emotions

Perseverance

Leadership Skills

Relationships—Though relationships are built on personal initiative and mutual acceptance by the persons involved, the responsibility of sustaining relationships is your responsibility if you want it to grow. Building relationships is considered by many modern scholars on leadership as the most important quality in leadership.

Confidence—Gaining confidence in a competitive environment begins with you committing yourself to the task at hand and to your team, followed by perfecting your skills through practice and extra effort and then concluded by mentally preparing yourself to meet all challenges, believing in yourself and your team and knowing you can do it.

Mental Toughness—Graham Jones identified several characteristics of mental toughness: unshakable self-belief, believing that you possess unique qualities and abilities, having a strong desire to succeed, bouncing back from performance set-backs and being fully focused and not letting distractions affect you. [6]

Focus—Focus is the awareness and execution of what you need to do to perform well and awareness of the factors around you that directly impact your performance. Eliminating indirect factors such as distractions is necessary for an athlete to perform at his/her best.

Emotions—Identify and manage your emotions. You want to examine the level of intensity for each of the emotions exhibited during your best and worst performances to determine what your levels should be to repeatedly perform at your best. [7]

Perseverance—Perseverance prevails when all else fails (author unknown). Perseverance will help you persist through the rough times with a brighter prospect for the future

Leadership Skills—Nurturing the qualities of being a good leader will serve you well in all your endeavors. Some of the qualities of being a leader are loyalty, caring for your teammates, supporting your teammates, empathy, being a good listener, developing relationships with team members, and believing in the team.

Discipline—Student athletes know and value the importance of team discipline. Teams and individuals that become relaxed in this important requirement show a decline in performance. Realize the difficulty of maintaining a disciplined environment for yourself and be prepared to deal with the temptations and distractions when they occur.

Smart—Being smart about your sport is a characteristic top athletes are known to have. Schedule personal time to think about how you can improve your skills and knowledge of the game and what it's going to take for those changes to occur. Always include your coach on your thinking so there is a concerted effort for your improvement and the team's improvement.

Perspective—You don't have to leave what you are doing to realize how important it is for you. A perspective on your involvement will help you enjoy and appreciate what you are doing while you are doing it and help you realize how all that you've learned will benefit you throughout your life.

Opportunity

Opportunity—Seizing opportunity isn't luck but hard work and preparation. You want to work as hard as if you were in the position you're striving for and be prepared to take it when the opportunity arises.

Relationships

PERFORMANCE

1. Tom Rath and Jim Harter; WELL BEING The Five Essential Elements, Gallup Press, 2010 | 2. Ellis, A., & Harper, R.A. (1997). A Guide to Rational Living. Woodland Hills, Ca. 91364: Melvin Powers Wilshire Book Company. | 3. Author — Lou Holtz
4. Daniel Goleman, Emotional Intelligence, (Bantam Dell, 1995) | 5. Out of the Blue, Bonnie D. Ford; ESPN.Com; 07/29/16 | 6. Graham Jones (2002) What Is This Thing Called Mental Toughness? An Investigation of Elite Sport Performers, Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 14:3, 205-218, DOI: 10.1080/10413200290103509 | 7. Yuri L. Hanin, Emotions in Sport, Human Kinetics, 2000