

SLUMPS

RULE OUT THE PHYSICAL

Before you assume that a slump is mental, you have to rule out the physical or technical factors that might be causing it. If I'm not running fast, is there something wrong with my start, my stride, the workouts or my running mechanics. If I consistently run slower, is there something I'm doing to cause this in my training regimen. Don't assume you're a head case until you're sure the physical part of performance is ruled out!

IS THE SLUMP RELATED TO SOMETHING GOING ON OFF THE FIELD?

Sometimes runners get into a slump because they are preoccupied or distracted by family or personal problems/pressures. Sometimes a slump is one of the only ways an athlete can cope with too many performance pressures. The athlete may not even be aware that this is the case as the problem is going on just out of consciousness.

DEVELOP AWARENESS OF THE SLUMP AS A DIRECT RESULT OF "FAULTY MENTAL STRATEGIES"

Slumps are most often self-maintained by what the athlete says to him/herself just before a race. Find out how you set yourself up by examining your pre-performance self-talk, imagery and focus.

NORMALIZE AND REFRAME THE SLUMP

Slumps and failure in running are normal. To be successful you must learn to deal with and master failure. A bad race or two does not cause the slump. The slump is a direct result of what you say to yourself about your failures. Reframe the meaning of those bad races as "what do I need to do to have the good ones". Failure gets you closer to success if you learn from them and then forget them.

CHALLENGE FAULTY BELIEFS

The slumping runner has stopped believing in themselves. If left unchecked the negative beliefs will continue to keep you in a slump. Look for the things you're doing right. Remember your successes (the slumping athlete develops "amnesia" for their good games). Confront your negativity and challenge your "I can't".

RESTORE CORRECTIVE IMAGERY

A slumping athlete has a tendency to always "see" what he/she doesn't want to happen instead of what they want to have happen. Help to "change the channel" and begin to focus on getting up that hill, passing a certain teammate, running hard through the line, instead of on what they are afraid of. The more internal practice of the right images, the more chance the athlete will have of quickly snapping out of the performance difficulties.

RESTORE PROPER CONCENTRATION

Yogi Berra once said, "A full mind is an empty bat." The slumping athlete thinks too much and focuses in his/her head. When you're on, you're not thinking and instead, you're on automatic, focusing on the ball and just reacting. It's the faulty focus that's the main cause of the slump and that prevents the runner from just trusting and letting the race happen. Being too conscious causes the athlete to try too hard. Try to refocus and distract your conscious mind from the race battles themselves.

TEACH THE "HERE & NOW" RULE

When you run well, you're mentally in the "here & now". The slumping runner is in the past, thinking about mistakes and failures, or in the future entertaining the "what-ifs". Or they are in the wrong mental place, worrying about their coach, their parents, etc. Recognize when you leave the "here and now" of the performance, and to quickly get yourself back.

REPROGRAM THOUGHTS/DEVELOP SELF-CONFIDENCE

The slumping athlete maintains a lot of inner negativity. They are continually down on themselves. Their negativity is part of the overall problem. Help them work on changing their "mental diet". Help get them off all that "mental junk food" ("I stink", "I always", "I'll never" etc.). Remember G.I.G.O., Garbage In, Garbage Out.

TEACH STRESS CONTROL TECHNIQUES

The runners who get themselves stuck in a slump have trouble staying calm in the clutch. Nervousness gets in the way of relaxing and performing to your potential. Learn to control your breathing and muscle tension and you'll help yourself snap out of that slump. Athletes in a slump should try and, "act as if" they are not. This has to do with how you carry yourself. It refers to your posture. Watch a runner who's slumping and you'll see it in their face, shoulders, head and step. As a "fall back position" teach yourself to act like a winner on the outside, regardless of how you may feel on the inside.