

Training Session Plan: Developing Mental Strength

Session:	Developing Mental Strength
Session purpose:	The purpose of this session is to give you tips and techniques on how you can improve your mental strength when officiating your chosen sport to improve your consistency and create more enjoyment for all involved.
Learning outcomes:	<p>By the end of the session you will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define what factors are present in those who have mental strength • Identify what you do well • Recall specific rules from your sport under time pressure • Identify exercises to improve brain function • Demonstrate the process for juggling • Discuss a random topic with confidence • Identify distractions for officials and provide solutions for each
Facilitator:	
Duration:	2.5 hours
Preparation required:	Write “Who wants to be an Official” game questions. At least 12 questions, each with 4 possible answers. Start off with some easy questions and then increase the difficulty and knowledge required to get the right answer.

Resources:

Flipchart paper

'Post-it' notes

Blu Tack

Whiteboard

Juggling Balls or if not able to source tennis balls will be fine (enough for 3 balls per person, or 2 balls per pair)

Fact sheets:

- Preparation During the Week/Game Day preparation
- Physical Fitness Resources
- Monitoring Your Self Talk
- Improving Your Concentration
- Importance of being Assertive
- Communicating with Participants and Coaches
- Positive and Negative Emotions
- Officiating for the First Time Checklist

Who wants to be an Official cards

Evaluation forms

Time	Instructions	Resource
15 mins	INTRODUCTION	
	<p>Welcome and overview of training session</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome participants to the training session. • Do introductions by asking the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Name - Sport - Why did you get involved? - What do you hope to achieve from this training session? • Go through housekeeping, e.g. emergency procedures, location of toilets, expected finish time. • Go through the session purpose and learning outcomes. 	
15 minutes	MENTAL STRENGTH	
	<p>What do we mean by Mental Strength?</p> <p><i>Small group activity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divide up the session group into groups of between 2 and 4 depending on the numbers and then give out the activity instructions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Give each group a flipchart. Ask each group to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - List the behaviours they would expect to see and hear from officials who have what we would call “Mental Strength”. Provide examples in your descriptions if necessary • Ask each group to go through their flipchart(s). 	

Time	Instructions	Resource
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask other participants to add to their thoughts. • Write up on a whiteboard the behaviours that appear on more than one flipchart • Explain that today we will focus on the following key factors that if in place have a powerful impact on determining the mental strength of an official: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self Esteem • Knowledge • Exercise • Concentration • Communication & Confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 flipchart sheets
10 minutes	SELF ESTEEM	Monitoring Your Self Talk resource
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask the group what self esteem is and why it is important in not only your role as an official but also in all aspects of your life. • Handout the Monitoring your self talk fact sheet and go through the key points with them. • Have them turn to the Self Esteem list page and write down 10 things that they like about themselves or 10 things that they can do well. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After 5 minutes go around the room and ask each person to share one item of the list with the rest of the group. 	
20 minutes	KNOWLEDGE	Who wants to be an Official cards
	Knowing your stuff provides an official with confidence to make the right decisions knowing why you are making the call and being able to explain why the call has been made. Without that confidence in the rules an official is more	

Time	Instructions	Resource
	<p>likely to be swayed by protestations from players, coaches and spectators. So let's see what you know!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise the class into groups of 3-4 and give each group 30 seconds to come up with a group name. • Explain that we're going to play a quick game based on Who wants to be a Millionaire. Each group will be asked a question. Each group has 3 lifelines – they can have a 50/50, ask another member in the team, or switch out a question for another. Once the lifeline is used it cannot be used again. • Ask for a volunteer to come up to the front of the room and sit in a seat while you ask a question. If correct assign points to that group for the question, if incorrect no points. • After a few rounds total up the points to see which group knows the sport the most. • Have a discussion with the group about why knowledge helps with the mental strength for officials and what we can all do to improve our knowledge and confidence in this area. 	

Time	Instructions	Resource
40 minutes	EXERCISE	
	<p>Explain that your brain is a thinking organ that learns and grows by interacting with the world through perception and action. Mental stimulation improves brain function and actually protects against cognitive decline, as does physical exercise. We all know about keeping physically fit, but to be mentally strong we need to be exercising our brain too.</p> <p>Organise the group into pairs, standing about 2-3 metres apart. Using the tennis balls or juggling balls ask each person to throw a ball to the other, using the hand they don't normally throw with.</p> <p>This is an exercise that can strengthen neural connections and even create new ones.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you notice? • Is it harder to be precise and accurate with your motions? • Do you feel like you did when you were first learning to tie your shoelaces? <p>If you are feeling uncomfortable and awkward don't worry, your brain is learning a new skill.</p> <p>Next, get each person to write their name and address on a piece of paper with their non-writing hand. They have 30 seconds to do this. Again this will feel very strange and awkward but is great for strengthening the brain. Remind the group they can try other neural building and strengthening exercises with everyday movements. Use your opposite hand to brush your teeth, dial the phone or</p>	<p>Juggling/Tennis balls Pens Paper</p>

Time	Instructions	Resource
	<p>operate the TV remote, and use the mouse at work with your other hand.</p> <p>In a fascinating experiment, researchers at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation discovered that a muscle can be strengthened just by thinking about exercising it.</p> <p>For 12 weeks (five minutes a day, five days per week) a team of 30 healthy young adults imagined either using the muscle of their little finger or of their elbow flexor. They asked the participants to think as strongly as they could about moving the muscle being tested, to make the imaginary movement as real as they could.</p> <p>Compared to a control group – that did no imaginary exercises and showed no strength gains – the little-finger group increased their pinky muscle strength by 35%. The other group increased elbow strength by 14%.</p> <p>What's more, brain scans taken after the study showed greater and more focused activity in the prefrontal cortex than before. The researchers said strength gains were due to improvements in the brain's ability to signal muscle.</p>	
	<p>GROUP ACTIVITY: JUGGLING</p>	

Time	Instructions	Resource
	<p>These step by step rules will begin with simple one ball exercises, through to two balls, and finally to the three ball cascade.</p> <p>The longer and better you practise the essential throwing and catching movement with one ball the easier you will progress to two and then three. People who try two or three balls before they learn the basics will, as with any new skill, tend to develop bad habits and a loss of confidence. Try to remember to keep an open mind, relax, and don't worry about making mistakes. Only by making mistakes do we learn. In the early stages practise for no more than ten to fifteen minutes at a time with at least an hour between sessions.</p>	
	<p>One ball</p> <p>Stand straight and comfortably balanced with one ball only in your dominant hand. Tuck your elbows into your waist and gently throw the ball to your other hand, peaking at your eye-line. Throw it back and forth from hand to hand. Throw at waist height, catch at waist height, and get the ball moving in a sideways figure-eight pattern, catching on the outside and throwing on the inside, in a kind of scooping motion.</p> <p>This is the essential pattern that your brain and body must learn. If the ball goes too far forward stand close to a wall so it stays close. When you have practised this so you can do it almost with your eyes closed, clap your hands once between throwing and catching. When you can do this, practise clapping twice. You can try other things like touching your nose or clapping behind your head, twice between throwing and catching, before moving to two balls.</p>	

Time	Instructions	Resource
	<p>Two balls</p> <p>With a ball in each hand throw first one and then the other as the first peaks.</p> <p>If you're throwing properly in a figure-eight pattern the balls will not collide.</p> <p>At first don't worry about catching the balls.</p> <p>Do not pass the balls (schoolgirls often learn circular juggling, which is based on alternate throwing and passing, so if you tend to pass because of this you'll need to re-train your brain to throw and catch instead, or the three ball cascade will elude you forever).</p> <p>Learn to catch the first ball before you try catching both.</p> <p>Say aloud as you progress 'throw throw drop drop', then 'throw throw catch drop' and finally 'throw throw catch catch'.</p> <p>Practise starting with your dominant hand and then starting with the other hand, and then alternating. You must practice this until it feels comfortable and is reasonably reliable until you move to three balls.</p>	

Time	Instructions	Resource
	<p>Three balls</p> <p>Hold two balls in the hand you wish to start with (hand 1), and one ball in the other hand (hand 2). Do as you practised with two balls, but after catching the first ball in hand 2 throw the third ball from hand 1. Hand 1 catches the second ball a split second after throwing the third ball. Apart from that split second between throwing and catching there is only ever one ball in the air.</p> <p>Your verbal command now becomes 'throw throw throw throw etc'. This is the Three Ball Cascade.</p> <p>Debrief the activity</p> <p>Ask: What does that tell us about the practice to improve our mental strength when it comes to officiating?</p> <p>As with juggling, you don't rush to the end but start slowly with each new skill building in incremental steps on the previous activity.</p> <p>And you stick with each step until you've mastered it before moving on.</p> <p>So with officiating for your sport, you start with the basics and practice those regularly before moving on.</p> <p>Focus on areas that are an issue and when you can confidently get the call right a majority of the time you can move on.</p>	

Time	Instructions	Resource
20 minutes	CONCENTRATION	
	<p>Skills for concentration fall into two major categories: First, focus of attention on targeted, relevant information, and second, dissociation from non-targeted, irrelevant, and potentially distracting, information.</p> <p>As an official you may have found that you are excellent at directing your attention when distractions are low. You may falter when the distractions increase. Movement on the sideline, crowd noise, airplanes flying overhead, and coaches yelling instructions are examples of external distractions that can break concentration, meaning that the attention is grabbed by the distraction. The outcome is a split in the official's attention.</p> <p>Distractions may be either internal or external.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Split the class into 2 groups. Handout flipchart paper to each. • One group is to list all the types of external distractions that an official faces, the other to list all the internal distractions. • Each group has 3 minutes. • Ask each group to go through their lists. • Ask the group to swap their lists. Each group is now going to come up with a solution to either minimise or eliminate each of the distractions listed by the other team. <p>The groups have 10 minutes. Following this ask each group to present back their solutions and allow time for everyone to make notes on a piece of paper.</p>	Improving Your Concentration resource

Time	Instructions	Resource
20 minutes	COMMUNICATION & CONFIDENCE	
	<p>A key factor in mental strength is being able to communicate your decisions with confidence and not getting into process discussions or having to justify yourself to others in the game.</p> <p>This activity will see how you are at confidently communicating information to others and handling any questions!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hand out a piece of paper to each participant. • Ask them to write any topic on the piece of paper. Any topic that comes to mind – dogs, origami, sushi, NASA, Brad Pitt – any topic is ok. • Once they've written the topic go around the room and collect all the pieces of paper. Put the pieces in a box/hat etc. Mix them all up. • Go back around the room and ask each person to put draw out a piece of paper. • Explain that they are now an expert on the topic in front of them. • They have 1 minute to think about how they are going to discuss their knowledge of the topic in front of them. <p>Following 1 minute explain that each person is going to come to the front of the room and speak with authority about their topic for 1 minute. Following 1 minute there will be questions regarding their topic of expertise from the audience which they will answer with confidence and authority because, after all, they are an expert in this topic!</p>	Paper Pens

Time	Instructions	Resource
	<p>Ask if anyone would like to go first and begin. If the group seems unsure have the group choose a topic for you and go first so you can role model the activity for them.</p> <p>Afterwards, discuss the parallels for officiating. Namely, sometimes we aren't entirely sure, but we've made a call based on what's in front of us. The way we communicate that decision must leave no doubt that we know what we're doing because as the official, it is expected that we are an expert on that sport and know what we're doing. If we can't convince the players and coaches of that, we risk losing the respect of those involved and we will then have anarchy. Dogs and Cats living together. Mass Hysteria!</p> <p>Thank everyone for their efforts and ask them to fill in an evaluation form. Remind them that the SPARC website has many resources that cover in more detail some of the topics we've covered together.</p> <p>Finish with group hug.</p>	