

THINKING TRAPS FOR ATHLETES



All-or-nothing thinking (also called black-and-white): You view a situation in only two categories instead of on a continuum. Example: "If I'm not a total success, I'm a failure."

Catastrophizing: You predict the future negatively without considering other, more likely outcomes. Example: I had a bad first shift – I am going to have a bad game.

Disqualifying or discounting the positive: You unreasonably tell yourself that positive experiences, deeds, or qualities do not count. Example: "I played well today, but that doesn't mean I'm good; I just got lucky."

Emotional reasoning: You think something must be true because you "feel" it so strongly, ignoring or discounting evidence to the contrary. Example: "I know I do a lot of things well, but I still feel like I'm not going to get it done."

Labeling: You put a fixed global label on yourself or others without considering that the evidence might more reasonably lead to a less disastrous conclusion. Example: "Cement hands. He's no good."

Magnification/minimization: When you evaluate yourself, another person, or a situation, you unreasonably magnify the negative and/or minimize the positive. Example: "Getting singled out proves how bad I am. Getting praise doesn't mean I'm good."

Mental filter: You pay undue attention to one negative detail instead of seeing the whole picture. Example: "Because coach told me I need to compete harder [although he also told me when I battled hard, I was really good] it means I'm not playing well."

Mind reading: You believe you know what others are thinking, failing to consider other, more likely possibilities. Example: "Coach doesn't believe in me."

Overgeneralization: You make a sweeping negative conclusion that goes far beyond the current situation. Example: "[Because I was nervous the first day] I don't have what it takes to play at this level."

Personalization: You believe others are behaving negatively because of you, without considering more plausible explanations for their behavior. Example: "Coach didn't say anything to me because he is pissed off at me."

"Should" and "must" statements: You have a precise, fixed idea of how you or others should behave, and you overestimate how bad it is that these expectations are not met. Example: "It's terrible that I had a turnover. I should never make mistakes. I must score on this shift."

Tunnel vision: You only see the negative aspects of a situation. Example: "Coach doesn't know anything. I am not going to get anything out of this practice."

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Focusing on the past or future: “I need to score now for a chance to win.; I really messed up that last play, I have to make up for it next shift”. Not letting go of past performances or putting unrealistic pressure on yourself takes away from where your focus needs to be – on the present.

Focusing on weaknesses during competition: “I don’t have my legs today.” Dwelling on weaknesses will erode confidence. In competition you should bombard yourself with positive, informative, action focused thoughts.

Focusing only on outcome: Puts your focus on things that are out of your control. Demanding perfection from yourself. This is unrealistic and creates a tremendous amount of pressure and tension that becomes a distraction and makes it harder to focus and perform at your top level.

Over-investment: Connecting all of your identity to your results as a player

Perfectionism: setting impossibly high goals for yourself and then berating yourself for failing

Fear of failure: maintaining a strong belief, and the accompanying fear reaction, that failure will lead to a bad consequence

- Fear of Shame or embarrassment
- Fear of losing a positive self-image
- Fear of an uncertain future
- Fear of disappointing others (coaches, teammates, scouts, loved ones)
- Fear of important others losing interest
- Fear of upsetting important others

Expectations: Believing that you must produce a certain result in a game

Negativity: Focusing on doubts, worries, fears, anxieties before or during a practice or game

Closely related to thinking traps are deep beliefs that we hold about ourselves, the people around us, life and hockey. These deep traps are inaccurate and lead to out of proportion reactions that may interfere with a hockey player reaching his or her potential. Most of the time we don’t even know we have them, but they trigger powerful emotional reactions. For example, when we feel disrespected, we end up with anger; when we feel a loss, we can feel sad; and when we feel we are in danger or are threatened we feel anxious. Some of the most common deep traps include:

1. I must do well in hockey and if I don’t, I’m an incompetent, worthless person.
2. I must do well to gain the love and approval of others, and if I don’t it is horrible.
3. Everyone must always treat me with respect and fairness.
4. The conditions of my life must be arranged so that I get what I want easily and quickly.
5. Asking for help is a sign of weakness, so I don’t address an area that I am struggling with

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