

### **LEVEL III – ASSIGNMENT 12 – BOB WOOD**

#### **SUCCESSFUL GOAL KICKING USING VISUALISATION AND ROUTINES (or HOW TO USE YOUR BRAIN AS AN ALLY NOT AN ENEMY)**

When goal kickers perform below their best they are usually thinking of the outcome and the importance of the kick. They concentrate on the wrong thing. Their technique suffers. They choke.

The purpose of visualisation and routines is to maximise success rates by focussing on the one thing that kickers can control and that is the process of goal kicking. The outcome is simply a result of the process.

From the outset it should be emphasised that failure to kick a goal does not always equate to choking. SUCCESS IS A WORTHY OPPONENT and sometimes the process can be faultless yet the outcome negative.

Kicks can be missed because of wind gusts, a greasy ball, hot/cold weather or the kick was simply out of range or too hard.

Players should be reassured that in some circumstances, it is OK to miss a kick.

#### **VISUALISATION**

Visualisation involves perfectly reconstructing in the mind's eye the specific details of a competitive performance.

There are some very important points to remember when initially undertaking visualisation.

1. You should be in a comfortable chair or lying down with your eyes closed.
2. It is vital to be relaxed before you start rehearsing kicks.
3. The rehearsal should be seen in the correct time frame. You should not be seeing things in slow motion or fast forward. The rehearsal has to be life-like and realistic.
4. In the first instance the rehearsal should be of an “internal” nature, that is, seen through your own eyes rather than as a TV camera might see the skill. (Later on it can be advantageous to see things from both perspectives.)
5. Very importantly, visualisation is a skill that has to be learned. Many newcomers find this very difficult at first. It requires constant practice. However, perseverance can lead to significant improvements.
6. Visualisation sessions should be scheduled into weekly training plans and regularly monitored by the coach.
7. You should always see yourself performing well. Visualisation should be positive and successful, not depressing.

## **PROBLEMS & PITFALLS IN VISUALISATION**

### **1. Unrealistic Expectations**

Visualisation training is not a performance quick fix. It requires the same time and patience to develop that physical skills do.

Visualisation will not make up for poor technique.

### **2. Lack of Commitment to Practising Visualisation Skills**

It is a skill that requires systematic practice to develop and refine. Unfortunately, many kickers quickly lose interest in Visualisation when they fail to achieve immediate performance improvements. Often kickers, therefore, mistakenly assume the imagery does not work.

### **3. Lack of Coach Support and Follow-up**

It is vital that coaches show a belief in visualisation. Visualisation sessions should be factored into kickers' weekly schedules.

If a mistake is made during kicking practice, kickers should be given 5 seconds to replay a correct version of the kick in their minds. Conversely, after successful kicks, they can take a few moments to reinforce what they did well.

## **Goal Kicking Relaxation and Visualisation Exercise**

The following example could be taped for each goal kicker and replayed regularly as part of their weekly schedule.

"Close your eyes... focus on your breathing... follow your breath in... and out ... in and out ... As you breathe out, you breathe out fatigue and tension... as you breathe in ... you breathe in energy and strength ... out with fatigue and tension ... in with energy and strength.

You breathe in ... and out ... energy in ... fatigue out."

I want you to picture the beach. As the waves roll in, you breathe in. As the waves roll out, you breathe out. The waves bring in energy as they come in ... and take away fatigue as they roll out ... the waves roll in ... the waves roll out ... in with energy ... out with fatigue.

I want you to think of your routine or process for goal kicking. What you do when you get the ball ... place the tee ... line up the ball ... take the same steps every time ... now you relax ... visualise ... and pull the trigger ... just kick the ball ... there are no outcomes, only a process.

I want you to go over the routine once more. I want you to feel it as well as see it.

I want you to think of your routine or process for goal kicking. What you do when you get the ball ... place the tee ... line up the ball ... take the same steps every time ... now you relax ... visualise ... and pull the trigger ... just kick the ball ... there are no outcomes, only a process.

Now, I want you to transport yourself to a couple of hours before the game ... see the ground ... feel and see the wind conditions ... see the crowd ... the players ... friends ... family ... the scoreboard. Now bank that experience.

Now I want you to step forward to the game itself ... you feel strong, confident and relaxed. All your training has paid off ... all the sacrifices ... all the hard work ... the ground is exactly as you visualised it ... the wind ... the crowd ... the players ... family and friends.

The game is going well, you feel strong and in control. Now it is your turn to step up to the mark. The time has come. You feel a sense of nervous anticipation come over your body. It's now pay day. You know how to relax. Your mind has been here a hundred times before. There are no outcomes, only a process.

You breathe in ... and out ... in with energy ... out with fatigue ... you go to the old reliable process ... that special routine ... you place the tee ... line up the ball ... take the same number of steps ... visualise putting a good kick on the ball ... give yourself the cue ... RHYTHM ... and pull the trigger ... what a great kick ... your process was flawless.

Take a moment to celebrate the kick ... then go back to the present ... the game ... the only thing which you can control ... the present ... always focus on the present. Now bank this experience – it will help you in the future.

## **ROUTINES**

In the above visualisation exercise routines were mentioned.

The purpose of routines is based on the premise that you need to control yourself before you can control performance.

Routines are like funnels that channel thoughts and actions before a game, a set play or a goal kick.

You should think of your routines as a checklist of things to do before you perform, in the same way you might draw up a checklist of things to take on an overseas trip. **The checklist occupies the brain in a process that stops the brain worrying about an outcome.**

Your pre-match routine could be like this ...

### **Before you go to the ground**

1. Give yourself a steady diet of positive thoughts.
2. Think about playing well – this will give you confidence to kick well.
3. Spend 10 minutes by yourself and do some relaxation and positive visualisation.

### **At the ground**

1. Choose a time that signifies leaving all other roles that you play in your life behind you (husband, father, boyfriend, employee etc.). You become a “professional” footballer. This could be as you change into your gear.
2. Familiarise yourself with the environment, e.g. slope of the ground, wind, crowd.
3. Choose a focal point – something you can focus on in or beyond the playing area when you need to slow down and regain composure, e.g. the centre stripe on the cross bar or a face in the crowd.
4. Set your mission, plan or purpose for the day ... “what I want to do today is ...”

### The team stretch and warm up

1. Note how you are feeling.
2. During the jokes, chatter and banter stage, discipline yourself for at least a few moments of mental preparation.
3. Ask yourself “... am I where I want to be mentally right now? ... is my head on my game or am I concerned with things outside football?”
4. Breathe slowly, steadily – become focussed.

### Kicking that goal

Have a present focus and concern yourself completely in the here and now, that is, the routine for kicking goals. Sure, have a game plan for the next 5, 10, 30, 80 minutes but when it comes time to kick that goal, stay in the moment... the routine.

When you “have to kick that goal”, the fear of failure takes over.

Your focus is the process ... the routine. The result takes care of itself.

You know the routine. In brief, it is:

Follow your breath in and out ... in and out ... you breathe in energy and strength ... you breathe out fatigue and tension. The waves bring in energy and they take away fatigue as they roll out.

Place the tee ... line up the ball ... take the same steps every time ... continue to relax ... visualise the kick ... think rhythm ... pull the trigger ... just smoothly run in and kick the ball ... there are no outcomes, only a process ... what a great kick ... your process/routine was flawless.

Take a moment to celebrate the kick, then go back to the present.

Two of the great kickers of modern Rugby have also given their thoughts on Visualisation and Routines:-

Neil Jenkins in a research paper entitled *Routines, Rituals & Rugby: Case Study of a World Class Goal Kicker* by Robert C. Jackson & Julien S. Baker, and John Eales in a newspaper interview with Jim Tucker before his last game against the All Blacks.

These are their thoughts.

### Cues:

Neil Jenkins:

*“I just ... think ... rhythm”*

John Eales:

*“... slow for the rhythm”*

Neil Jenkins:

*“I just try to focus on a spot between the posts”*

### **Positive Thoughts:**

Neil Jenkins:

*"I imagine putting all my problems in a black box and closing the black box and putting them behind me out of the way"*

*"Sometimes that little thing comes into your head where you're ... 'Oh God, I hope I don't miss this one' but then I think, you know, just like 'piss off'."*

### **Visualisation:**

Neil Jenkins:

*"I ... think about the ball and form a mental image, picturing it going through the posts..."*

### **Routine:**

Neil Jenkins:

*"... whether it's 20 or 50 metres out I'll always do the same sort of routine..."*

John Eales:

*"Early in my kicking days I used to get a lot more nervous because I had no solid routine"*

When John Eales kicked THAT penalty goal to sink the All Blacks a year ago in Wellington, Jim Tucker reported that ... "he learnt to control his nerves. Instead of being daunted by that angled kick in Wellington, the wind and a hostile crowd, he broke the challenge down to bite size bits".

John Eales:

*"... you think of what you've done a thousand times before at goal kicking practice. You don't think of the outcome or the crowd ... it was steps back, step across ... head down slow for the rhythm and follow through."*

### **Relaxation:**

Neil Jenkins:

*"I take a deep breath ... just makes you relax a little bit before you go into it."*

### **Conclusion:**

As John Eales says, it may take a thousand times to get it right but as both he and Neil Jenkins attest, visualisation and routines are the anchor point for successful goal kicking.

Trust the process, forget the outcome and let your brain be your ally, not your enemy.