



At the **Center for Sports and The Mind**, we train athletes to perform in all arenas of life. We believe that we can help you do what you thought was the impossible.

Getting there starts with developing an understanding of what you need to do to get in and stay in your Optimal Performance Zone (OPZ).

The above graphic illustrates what research confirms. Certain conditions create flow states that allow us to perform a specific task or skill at a high level. I will outline the first steps you need to take **FIND YOUR OPZ**.

Step 1) Develop the knowledge and awareness of what the OPZ is and what is not.

Research shows that the OPZ has several important conditions present. They are:

- 1) Sense of Control and Confidence. – You believe you can influence the outcome.
- 2) Focused on Immediate Moment. – You stay in the moment and focus on what is important now.
- 3) Loss of Self – Identity – You are focused only your thoughts about yourself not anyone else.
- 4) Time Flies – It’s like playing pickup games – you don’t notice time.
- 5) Balanced Energy – You are poised but yet intense.
- 6) Passion for the Game – You play for the love of your game.
- 7) Engaged – You block out any and all distractions.

Athletes who struggle to stay in the zone often perform in one or both of these default performance zones.

Many athletes hamper performance by getting in the too tense zone. In this zone there is a lack of confidence, tight muscles, uncontrolled energy, an over focus on the wrong things, and narrow awareness of the environment. In the zone, you often miss important information in order to play well.

Others play in the too relaxed zone. In this zone an athlete is overconfident, disengaged, lacks energy and focus, has no love or passion for the game. Often they cannot decide what information to pay attention to in order to play at a high level.

Step 2 – Identify your Default Zone.

Everyone has a default zone that they likely revert to when uncomfortable, stressed or under pressure. Learning how to perform at a high level means you need to be able to learn how to get from you Default to your OPZ.

Step 3 – Identify what takes you out of your OPZ.

Throughout competition challenges, mistakes, great plays, bad breaks, poor calls, and distractions from the fans can take a player out of their OPZ. In addition challenges, bad breaks, mistakes, and distractions can also take you out of your opz or prevent you from even starting there.

In order to learn how to stay in your OPZ you have to be able to identify the specific things that take you out you so you can create a plan to deal with them when they happen. In some cases, there may be additional obstacles that prevent you from returning.

Step 4 – Create a plan to return to your OPZ.

Your plan for returning to your OPZ means identifying steps you can take to calm your emotions and your body. This typically involves a fight, flight, or freeze reaction which creates an emotional distraction. To manage that reaction you need to use a sensory distraction to reboot.

Here are a couple of examples. Try them and see what works for you.

- 1) **Eye Movements or Fist Squeeze** -Move your eyes back and forth without moving your head or alternately squeeze your fists. This activates all parts of your brain and allows them to work together.
- 2) **Count** – Count back from 100 by 7's.
- 3) **Drink water**
- 4) **Centering Breathes** – Breathe in to the count of 5, hold for 2 and out for 7.
- 5) **Visualization** – Visualization or meditation focused on playing in your OPZ or playing for the love of the game.

These techniques will help you to manage the physiology of your brain.

Learning how to return to your OPZ involves using and mastering a variety of different mental skills. Because successful performance in sports requires a high level of emotional engagement, great athletes need to be able to manage their psychophysiology of their thoughts and their emotions.

To learn more about what you can do to train your brain to return to your OPZ check out our services page which includes information about bi-lateral stimulation, heart rate variability training, and neurofeedback.