

Mental Focus

"How do I stop being so nervous before a big soccer game?" 4 Feb, 2015

This is a common and sometimes frustrating issue experienced by even the most talented of soccer players. But what you might not understand is that being nervous is a good thing.

Yup, that's right! It means that you care about what you're about to do, and that's definitely something to be proud of. You may not realize it, but it's completely natural to feel nervous.

But you still might find it hard to play under the kind of big soccer game pressure that causes nervousness.

The key to overcoming this is to focus on what you can control and not on what you can't.

Don't over burden yourself with worries like, "What if this happens?" or "What if this player is playing?" or "What if so and so is watching?" Don't worry about that stuff! Just focus on playing soccer well, with patience and simplicity. You love playing soccer, don't you? Then, what's there to worry about? Just play the game and have fun doing it.

Also, if you've put in the soccer training work prior to the tryout or game, then you know you're ready. If you've gotten in good shape and worked on improving your soccer skills during the off-season, then you deserve a lot of credit and should feel confident about your soccer abilities. If you've done all the hard work and deserve to succeed.

One thing that works in overcoming pre-game jitters is to practice visualization. Prior to the game or tryout, picture yourself at the soccer field running through various skills and moves.

See yourself crossing the ball or shooting or dribbling past the defender. See yourself calm and comfortable and playing well. See yourself overcoming any problems that might arise.

Granted, all that sounds easier said than done, right? Don't worry. If you have pre-game jitters, then read on and discover how you can relax yourself before a game or what to do during the game so you stay sharp:

Here are some quick points to keep in mind if you want to overcome pre-game nerves:

Run through a pre-game or pre-practice ritual - series of things you do to get ready and feel confident

Know where you want to play the ball before you get it

Play simple one and two touch soccer (pass and move)

Work hard and get stuck in when you need to on defense (hustle)

Ask for the ball all the time (communicate)

Make direct and decisive runs

Recognize where you are on the field and where your options are

Have fun and encourage your teammates (you all want to win)

Forget your mistakes and make up for them with hustle

Keep your head up

Play until the final whistle

think positive - don't be too hard on yourself

Allow yourself to get into the game with a few simple plays and then build off of that

Play crisp and sharp passes (play with confidence)

Be cheeky (take chances in the attacking third - take players on, try that step over or that back heel when it's on, take shots, get your crosses in the box)

Keep it Simple: The legendary Dutch player and coach Johan Cruyff once explained that if things were going badly on the soccer field, it was helpful to do a few small things well — just makes some easy passes to a teammate near you — to get your confidence back.