

PERFORMANCE CONSISTENCY: FOCUSING IN REAL TIME

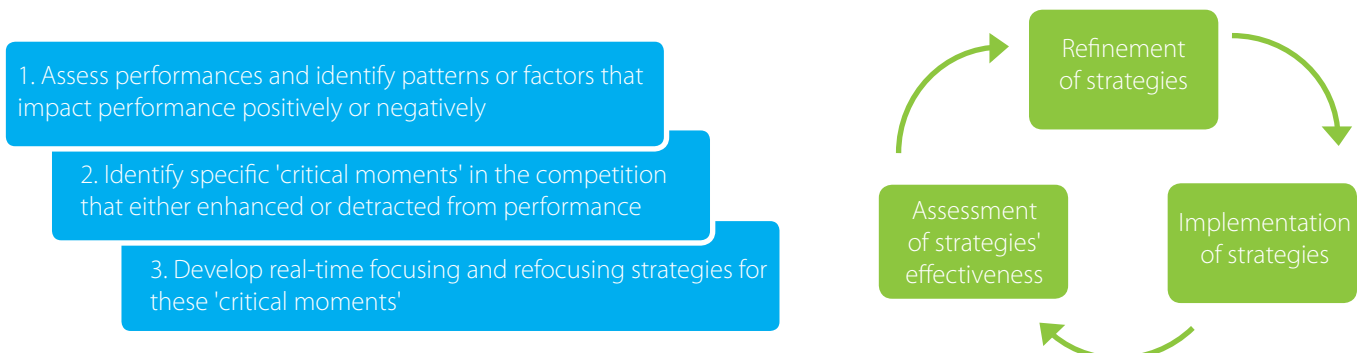
BY DR. BRUCE PINEL, MENTAL PERFORMANCE CONSULTANT, CANADIAN SPORT INSTITUTE

Striving to perform consistently at a level that reflects the training and preparation invested is a critical element of performance excellence. For athletes, performance consistency is very rewarding and allows confidence to build around their ability to 'deliver' on what they have been training for. For coaches, the performance consistency of athletes is critical for decision-making around playing time, selections, and trust in the ability to perform. When facing an important game, race, event, shift, rotation, or phase in play, having confidence around performance consistency is a 'great place to be'. Not knowing what you are going to get because of an inconsistent performance history is a much more challenging place to be.

Unfortunately, performance consistency can often be characterized more as 'performance inconsistency' where predicting performance is like a game of roulette; could be this, could be that, could be something entirely different. Using previous performances as a benchmark, there exists a continuum around performance expectations ranging from HOPING to perform at one end and KNOWING you will perform at the other. Entering the competition HOPING for a good performance if everything 'lines up perfectly' (versus KNOWING with confidence that it will be a good performance regardless of what happens) is a breeding ground for stress, anxiety, negativity, distractions, and excuse making.



A first step towards achieving performance consistency is to increase self-awareness around performances and the factors that impact it. From a macro level (big picture perspective) it is important to start tracking / recording / assessing performances so patterns can be determined and factors that either positively or negatively impact performance can be identified. The next step is to examine performance from a micro level (small picture perspective) and identify the specific 'critical moments' within the competition that either contributed to enhanced / sustained performance excellence or detracted from it. Once these 'critical moments' have been identified, the following step is to develop real-time focusing and refocusing strategies to use in the midst of the competition to either sustain performance excellence or overcome factors that negatively impact it. The final step is more of a cycle that involves on-going assessment, refinement and implementation of the strategies around critical moments and their impact on performance consistency.



The old adage that ‘the game can change in an instant’ is very accurate. It’s often not a matter of ‘if it will change’, but more of ‘when it will change’, so being prepared for these moments is essential in achieving performance consistency. Some of these moments ‘give you energy’ and contribute positively to performance, while other moments ‘take your energy away’ and can lead to negative performance if no response is in place. Therefore, recognizing both and having strategies around targeted actions, words, and thoughts that allow you to maintain focus or regain focus (refocusing) helps you to manage your energy in a way that is most effective toward achieving performance consistency.

The activity below is a good tool for both athletes and coaches to use in relation to the Critical Moments that impact performance in either direction, and an example is given. Complete the table below around your Critical Moments that either ‘give me energy’ or ‘take my energy away’ and your corresponding Focus and Refocus Targeted Responses. When identifying your Critical Moments consider all areas that can impact performance. These may include:

- Your play, decision-making, preparation, discipline, communication
- Team-mate’s play, decision-making, preparation, discipline, communication
- Opposition’s play, decision-making, discipline, reactions to situations
- Crowd behaviours, noises, cheering, jeering, distractions
- Goals / points scored for or against you
- Officiating calls or non-calls, perceived bias or favouritism
- Venue conditions, weather, stoppages in play, injuries, coaching, media

CRITICAL MOMENTS TOOL

Critical moments that ‘give me energy’		Focus Point – Targeted Response <i>Actions / words / thoughts for optimal performance</i>	
I just made a great play that lead to us scoring		Quickly move into position for the re-start and touch team logo on uniform	
Critical moments that ‘take my energy away’		Refocus Point – Targeted Response <i>Actions / words / thoughts for optimal performance</i>	
Start of event delayed and routines interrupted		Put hand on team logo and say “control, composure, confidence”	