

1-1-1995

## Book and Resource Reviews

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### Recommended Citation

Martin, J. J. (1995). Review of 'Risk taking: Performing your best during critical times; Concentration: Focus your mind, power your game; Visualization: The master skill in mental training; Drive and determination: Developing your inner motivation,' (1995). M, Dalloway, Optimal Performance Institute. In *The Sport Psychologist* **9**(1) (109-111).  
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## ● Book and Resource Reviews ●

*The Sport Psychologist*, 1995, 9, 109-111  
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***Risk Taking: Performing Your Best During Critical Times*** (1993, 62 pp.)

***Concentration: Focus Your Mind, Power Your Game*** (1993, 61 pp.)

***Drive and Determination: Developing Your Inner Motivation*** (1993, 83 pp.)

***Visualization: The Master Skill in Mental Training*** (1992, 63 pp.)

By Marie Dalloway. Published by Optimal Performance Institute, 320 West Medlock Drive, #205, Phoenix, AZ 85013. Tel: 602/274-1889; fax: 602/274-0466. (U.S. \$14.95 each, U.S. \$49.95 for the set)

*Reviewed by Jeffrey Martin, Division of Health, Physical Education and Recreation, Wayne State University*

Marie Dalloway has written a package of four manuals designed to help athletes develop their mental skills. In general, all four are “how-to” books aimed at helping athletes develop their mental abilities for sport. The topics are usually introduced in a brief and succinct manner, and subsequent text provides the reader with suggestions, exercises, and techniques for developing skills in each topic area. Sport examples are used liberally to introduce each topic, although at times the anecdotal stories run on. Dalloway appears to struggle with balancing the stories, examples, and exercises designed to convince readers of the importance of mental skills with the material designed to help readers develop their skills.

If applied psychology consultants are solely interested in broadening their repertoire of intervention strategies, then these manuals should be helpful. On the other hand, practitioners interested in thorough discussions of these topic areas or in research documenting intervention effectiveness should consider other sources. Athletes who are interested in developing their mental skill, but who have difficulty finding material to guide their efforts, should also find these publications helpful. Finally, potential consumers should be aware that the manuals are published “desktop style” with soft covers.

In *Risk Taking: Performing Your Best During Critical Times*, Dalloway presents risk taking as synonymous with stress management. Risk taking is introduced with examples of athletes facing challenging situations in which their abilities to manage stress and make sound cognitive decisions are vital to their performance. Readers familiar with the stress literature will recognize the second section, which presents a conceptual framework emphasizing the competitive situation, athlete’s appraisals, their subsequent physiological/cognitive responses, and finally, their behavioral responses. Dalloway effectively uses this model to provide a framework for the intervention techniques that follow.

The heart of this publication is the presentation of a six-step intervention model aimed at self-awareness, self-talk control, competition plans or strategy, performance skill focus, relaxation techniques, and commitment. Generally speaking, these six steps provide useful and specific guidelines for managing stress, although at times the presentation of “how-to” materials is uneven. For example, lots of helpful information regarding self-talk and relaxation is presented. In contrast, the section on performance skills focus is brief, and material on developing commitment lapses into anecdotal illustrations of commitment in action. Admittedly, focus development is the topic of another manual. Additionally, Dalloway’s view of commitment development appears more closely aligned with Vealey’s notion of a “foundation skill” versus a “performance skill,” thus making it a more difficult area to target for intervention.

Consistent with the previous manual, in *Concentration: Focus Your Mind, Power Your Game*, Dalloway introduces the importance of concentration by citing examples where optimal concentration and lapses in concentration influence sport outcomes. Using Nideffer’s model of attention, Dalloway presents an easily understood view of concentration. Subsequent sections provide techniques for dealing with both internal and external sources of distraction.

Although it is encouraging to see some importance attached to assessing and monitoring concentration skills, two shortcomings in this area were noted. First, it is disappointing to continue to read that concentration assessment seems to be limited to the familiar “grid concentration exercise.” Second, although electrodermal activity (EDA) may indicate anxiety for some athletes, it is simplistic to assume that heightened EDA is a reliable indicator of anxiety. Presenting this relationship is misleading to readers unfamiliar with the literature. Aside from these criticisms, Dalloway organizes her intervention strategies effectively by targeting them to internal versus external distractions. Similar to the manual on *Risk Taking*, a chart orients the reader and summarizes various strategies.

*Drive and Determination: Developing Your Inner Motivation* focuses on two mental skill areas: goal setting and belief modification. For goal setting Dalloway presents a three-step program based on goal identification, goal formulation, and goal programming. In spite of incorporating a number of effective goal-setting principles, some important goal-setting considerations are missing. In particular, the distinction between performance and outcome goals is absent, and the notion that optimally challenging goals are a balance between difficult yet realistic goals is not present. Given the importance that applied sport psychology literature places on these considerations, the lack of information in this area is disturbing.

The concluding section targets the important area of beliefs. In short, Dalloway illustrates how athletes’ beliefs influence subsequent cognitions and behaviors. Although guidelines for identifying distorted or irrational beliefs are given, an inordinate amount of time is spent on exercises designed to convince the reader of the importance of beliefs. An excellent section on cognitive reframing and on changing self and performance-related beliefs concludes this manual. A variety of exercises and questions guide serious readers into an exploration of their personal belief systems and how these beliefs may be limiting their potential.

In terms of providing suggestions for imagery development and enhancement, *Visualization: The Master Skill in Mental Training* stood out from the companion manuals. The introduction of imagery is succinct and brief, and it

quickly takes the reader into the purposes of imagery and imagery exercises. A variety of basic exercises are presented to help readers develop their imagery abilities. The mental studio technique appears to be a novel, yet promising, approach to helping athletes combine relaxation, imagery, and self-talk techniques. Lastly, visualization techniques are categorized according to the purposes of problem solving, developing positive attitudes, and mental rehearsal. The strength of this particular manual is the number and variety of visualization exercises. Furthermore, each exercise has numbered steps and attendant scripts designed to guide the reader. In short, this publication provides readers a plethora of choices with which to develop their imagery abilities.

## ***Optimal Performance in Tennis: Mental Skills for Maximum Achievement in Athletics and Life***

By R. Christopher Barden, Bruce Jackson, and Martin E. Ford. Published 1992 by Optimal Performance Systems Research, 4025 Quaker Lane North, Plymouth, MN 55441-1637. (U.S. \$59.95, 147 pp.)

*Reviewed by Katheleen Avila, Peak Performance Institute*

This mental skills training book, which includes two audiotapes, is a systematic and clearly laid out application of techniques for achieving optimal or peak performance in tennis. The authors are very diligent in not only laying out how athletes should proceed to master mental skills to perform at their potential but also include a solid rationale based on "state-of-the-art psychological theory" as to why these skills work. The three authors present a thorough introduction to the optimal performance system, describing what it is and how it can benefit one's tennis game. I believe this introduction gives credibility to the material, its application, and how it is systematically presented. Credibility and a sense of enjoyment in reading are added by the authors quoting professional athletes, scientists, and popular authors to support their topic throughout the book.

Overall, this is one of the best applied mental skills books I have seen. As a clinician and practitioner I appreciate the solid rationale in the application of mental skills, yet at times the authors are too philosophical and may tend to sound a bit preachy for some readers. The authors claim that if the optimal performance in tennis program "is consistently practiced, it will enable you to reach your maximum potential in tennis as well as in many other areas of life" (p. 10). And on page 93 they state, "The goal of this book is thus to teach you to generate realistic positive attitudes—attitudes that will help you deal with the actual challenges you face in a maximally effective way."

Following the introduction and theoretical foundations, the book proceeds with chapters on relaxation training, cognitive restructuring (titled "Self-Image Enhancement"), goal setting, imagery, and visualization. The two audiotapes are introduced in the chapter on relaxation training. The benefits and "essentials" of relaxation training, as well as instructions to begin one's self-assessment of physiological functioning with a daily progress log are well done.

Yet, I was disappointed in the audiotapes. Tape 1 is titled "Deep Relaxation Training" and is about 17 minutes, and the second tape is titled "Daily Relaxation Program" and is 11 minutes. Each tape has the same script on both sides, eliminating the need to rewind, and both tapes are very similar. With only a few seconds spent on the breath, Dr. Barden proceeds to passive progressive muscle relaxation plus a few autogenic relaxation suggestions. His progression was confusing, not natural for me, and in places very fast. I was also confused with two brief imagery suggestions preceding the much longer guided imagery that was excellent in meeting the relaxation and focusing goals. The longer guided

imagery was followed in the first tape by directions to recall a peak performance and then mentally rehearse an upcoming performance. The second tape is very similar leaving out the directions to mentally recall and rehearse.

The chapter on positive cognitive programming titled “Self-Image Enhancement and Emotional Control” is well done in weaving the thread of controlling and focusing one’s thoughts intentionally and their relationship to emotional control and self-worth. The authors give excellent structure for the reader to work with beliefs and provide journal-writing exercises to enhance self-confidence, restructure irrational thinking and negative emotions, and maintain a realistic life perspective, which are all appropriately applied to tennis players. Goal setting is introduced in a very straight-forward and applied manner, instructing the reader to write down realistic, appropriate, and specific goals for their tennis game.

The last section specifically addressing mental skills is on imagery and visualization. Throughout this section the intrinsic emotional foundations of excitement, accomplishment, confidence, self-control, and satisfaction are reinforced as the critical underpinnings to the successful use of mental rehearsal. I like how the authors move from using mental recall of past peak performances to using mental rehearsal of future events. They use the terminology of *imagery* and *visualization* almost interchangeably. In two outlines describing aspects of mental rehearsal, the authors do an excellent job of describing internal imagery. Yet this is followed by defining specifically what one “should visualize.” In spite of the lack of clarity of whether the tennis player is mentally seeing him- or herself as in a “movie” or from within his or her sensory experience, the overall blueprint for applying this mental skill is well done.

The last part of the book brings together a final synthesis of the optimal performance state theory with diagrams to illustrate the interdependent nature of each of the specific components. The “essential elements” of the optimal performance state that are discussed include “the Zone, the Choke, Emotion Control, Withdrawal/Quitting, Attitudes and Philosophical Perspective, Energy Control, and Mental Focus” (p. 82). This is followed by a more philosophical piece that includes defining one’s personal standards of conduct in tennis and in life. On only one page do the authors mention ritual preparation and consistency, which I think could have been given more attention as an important application to the tournament tennis player and mental preparation. On the final 12 pages are excellent examples of application of the optimal performance system techniques in action, with several examples of player’s internal dialogue while processing the player’s mental strategy in relation to the score and the assessment of competitive play.

It is always hard to know whether the most motivated and mature athlete could learn and apply these techniques without the assistance of either a coach experienced with mental skills training or a sport psychologist. Yet for the more mature and motivated athlete I think this resource is one of the best I have seen that could make that possible. The authors’ clarity in theory within the workbook style makes this an excellent resource for any coach or sport psychologist who wants to systematically provide mental training to athletes. I would highly recommend *The Optimal Performance in Tennis* to any athlete or coach in any sport that is interested in applying mental skills, as well as to sport psychology professionals.