



How Can I Help My Son Over His Nervousness?

This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.

“Our 14-year-old son is a good athlete, but for individual sports events he gets so nervous that he actually ends up sick (stomach, headache) for a day or two after big events. We have done all we can think of as parents to help him relax and enjoy sports for the fun of it. We’ve even been to a neurologist to discuss what the physical triggers might be. Can anyone recommend a sports psychologist, books, or motivational DVDs that might help?”

PCA Response Excerpted From *Elevating Your Game* by PCA Founder Jim Thompson

Entering the 1992 U.S. Olympic trials, Dan O’Brien was riding high, having recently set the world record in the grueling, 10-event decathlon, whose winner is usually considered the world’s greatest athlete. In the pole vault, O’Brien took his first jump at 15 feet-9 inches, after passing on four lower opening heights.

O’Brien had easily cleared 16-1 in warm-ups and routinely cleared 15-9 in practice, but he hit the crossbar in his first two attempts. On his final attempt, he didn’t even reach the bar. Zero points in the vault meant O’Brien missed the U.S. Olympic Team, so the top decathlete in the world sat out the 1992 Barcelona Olympics.

Sometimes we want something so badly our desire gets in the way. We get “attached” when something seems so important we can’t feel good about ourselves unless we achieve it. Our self-worth is threatened, our efforts become feverish and ineffective, and we may even panic.

We’ve all had teammates so anxious about a last-second play they aren’t able to take their best shot. This happens at all levels of sports. After the Los Angeles Lakers edged the Boston Celtics in the 2010 NBA Finals, Kobe Bryant said of his poor shooting early in Game 7, “You know, I just wanted it so bad... And the more I tried to push, the more it kept getting away from me.”

In pressure moments, competitors can be helped by a concept called “non-attachment.” Non-attachment is the ability to detach oneself from the outcome of a performance. Top performing athletes understand that the result of an athletic contest does not define them as a person. When athletes define themselves by results, the desire to succeed can produce a hyped-up emotional state that robs them of their best effort.

*To learn more about *Elevating Your Game* and other PCA books visit www.positivecoach.org/our-work/our-books*

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