

Distractions? What distractions?

by Choeleen Loundagin

Have you ever found yourself “in the zone,”

where you are able to keep an intense focus

despite everything going on around you?

Have you ever been so easily distracted

that it felt impossible to stay focused?

Athletes possessing the ability to stay focused in any situation isn't luck; it's something athletes must develop. Learning this skill will help you to skate your best on a consistent basis.

Last month's article talked about focus. In this article, you will learn how to identify and deal with distractions so you can stay focused and skate your best.

Identify distractions

A distraction is anything that is not directly related to the task at hand. Things that are not under your control are also distractions, even if they are related to your task. Negative thoughts, past events, mistakes, thoughts unrelated to skating, competitors, judges, the outcome of events, expectations, noise, spectators, and the media all can be distractions.

Deal with distractions

After reading the following distraction control techniques, imagine yourself being distracted while skating, and try them out. This will allow you to discover which ones work best for you. Once you are able to successfully deal with distractions in your mind, try using the techniques to clear your head and focus before stepping on the ice. The last step is to be able to successfully regain your focus when you are faced with distractions while skating, particularly when you're under pressure.

Channel Clicking. Think of your mind as a TV with different screens. When you find that you have been

distracted and are on the wrong channel, change the channel to the one you want. Imagine you have a remote control or channel clicker to help you. You may find that taking a relaxing deep breath between changing channels will help you regain your focus. Think of the desired channel as THE (your name) CHANNEL.

Hot Air Balloon. Imagine a big hot air balloon tied to the ground. Now put whatever is distracting you into the balloon's basket. If the distraction is not a physical thing, picture a symbol for it. Cut the ties holding the balloon to the ground, and watch it float away with your distractions. Finish by returning your focus to the present task.

File It. Imagine you have a file cabinet somewhere in your mind. Use this cabinet to file away distractions that you will need to deal with after you skate. If the distraction is something you don't have to deal with later, get rid of it completely.

Colors. If a feeling is distracting you, such as frustration or nervousness, imagine the feeling as a color that has filled your body. Then, while breathing deeply and thinking “in with the good” as you breathe in and “out with the bad” as you breathe out, imagine the unwanted color being overtaken by a color that represents calmness and

confidence. Refocus on what you are doing once this color and these feelings have taken over.

Zoom Lens. Think of your focus as a camera lens and zoom in and out so you can get your focus off the distraction.

Delete It. Imagine that your mind has a delete button that you can use to send distractions to the trash bin.

Zap It. Imagine that your focus is like a computer screen and “zap” distractions away as you would in your favorite game.

Deal with It. If the distraction is something over which you have no control, deal with it by getting rid of it or changing it. If you can't control it but have to deal with, do so to the best of your ability. For example, maybe the condition of the ice is really bad. That is something you can neither change nor ignore, so figure out the best way to deal with it. Ask your coach for suggestions if you can't figure out how to deal with a situation.

Intensify. Block out a distraction by intensely focusing on what you want.

Imagine. If you are distracted by doubts, imagine being successful. Keep that image in your mind until it is time to actually perform what you previously doubted. Since it is difficult to imagine two scenes at once, choose to focus on the positive one.

Protective shield. Imagine that there is a protective shield around you, and you are able to control what enters the shield and what bounces off it. Set the controls so that all distractions bounce off the shield.