

# THE MENTAL MINUTE

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**ATHLETE SPOTLIGHT: CORMAC MCGINNIS – JUNIOR KNIGHTS**

**HOW BREATHING CAN HELP YOU COMPETE AND SLOW THE GAME DOWN**

**QUICK TIPS YOU CAN USE**  
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**WELCOME** to the inaugural The Mental Minute! We are extremely excited to share information about mental performance training! Through simple yet powerful practices, you'll find that small shifts in mental performance can lead to big gains in physical performance.

In this issue, we'll dive into the power of breathing and how you can intentionally slow the game down using proven breathing techniques. Breathing isn't just about relaxation—it's about building resilience, focus, and adaptability. By training yourself to use breathing as a tool to stay grounded under pressure, you'll find it easier to manage stress, maintain control, and stay in the moment.

Mastering this skill will equip you to face challenges with a calm, clear mind, keeping your goals in sight and allowing you to give your best every time you compete.

**THE MENTAL MINUTE** is a monthly newsletter intended to educate athletes, coaches, and parents about essential mental performance skills and keep you informed about upcoming training events and opportunities to book 1-on-1 training sessions with a mental performance coach.

Each newsletter is designed to focus on a specific mental skill (e.g. breathing, mental rehearsal, etc.) and offers practical insights and techniques to enhance your current mental performance skillset. Through this newsletter, we aim to support ongoing athletic growth to sustain engagement, personal development, competitive resilience within all sports disciplines through ongoing mental performance education.



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## Topic of The Month: Breathing

**BREATHING** is one of the simplest yet most powerful tools an athlete can use to enhance performance. It's more than just something we do automatically—when done with intention, breathing can help us control our emotions, stay focused, and recover quickly. A well-practiced breathing technique can be the difference between feeling calm and focused or anxious and distracted

focused or anxious and distracted especially during high-pressure moments in competition.

**WHAT IS BREATHING?** Controlled breathing, also called diaphragmatic or deep breathing, involves breathing from the diaphragm (belly) rather than shallow breaths from the chest. This type of breathing allows for better oxygen flow, helping to keep both the mind and body calm, clear, and ready for

action. **WHY IS BREATHING IMPORTANT?** Breathing impacts our heart rate and stress levels, making it essential for managing adrenaline and staying centered. By using controlled breathing, you can lower your heart rate, relax tense muscles, clear your mind and improve your focus. This reduces anxiety and helps you enter the zone

which is a state of focused relaxation where athletes perform at their best. Mastering this skill helps keep you grounded, no matter what's happening in the game.

**HOW TO USE BREATHING IN PRACTICE & GAMES** In practice, begin incorporating breathing exercises during warm-ups or cooldowns, taking time to focus on each breath. During games, use breathing to reset between plays, reduce nerves before big moments, and refocus after mistakes.

Practicing breathing skill regularly helps it become second nature, so you can quickly regain focus in competitive situations.



*Pete Alonso, New York Mets*

Pete Alonso takes a deep breath before each pitch during an at bat. Under stress, Pete stuck to his process which helped him produce several big home runs during the 2024 NL Championship Series against the LA Dodgers.

## Quick Tips You Can Use: Breathing

**PARENTS TIP:** Remind your athlete use these techniques in practice, before a game or whenever they need to regain control. Breathing is a simple but powerful way to help an athlete's mind in the game and their nerves in check.

Whether they're on the field or preparing for a big game, controlled breathing can be a secret weapon. Here are three simple but powerful breathing techniques to help athletes stay calm, focused, and in control.

**4-7-8 BREATHING** is a technique is designed to reduce anxiety and is as easy as counting. Inhale slowly for a count of 4, hold your breath for 7, and then exhale fully for 8. This rhythmic pattern can help reset your mind and release nervous jitters.

**BOX BREATHING / TACTICAL BREATHING** is also known as tactical breathing and is favored by athletes and even first responders to calm the nervous system. Breathe in for 4 counts, hold for 4, exhale for 4, and hold again for 4. It's like a "mental reset," perfect for finding calm in intense moments.

**TRIANGLE BREATHING** is helpful is you are feeling stressed or unfocused and is also a great choice. Start by inhaling deeply as you visualize moving along one side of a triangle, exhale along the next side, and pause briefly before starting again. This technique is fantastic for improving focus, promoting relaxation, and staying sharp.

## Upcoming Training Opportunities

EVENT	DESCRIPTION	DATE	LOCATION	SIGN-UP
Confidence Clinic	In-person clinic at focused on building and strengthening confidence for peak performance.	2/17	D Bat (DuPage)	<a href="#">Here</a>
1-on-1 Training	Personalized one-on-one mental performance coaching sessions tailored to your specific goals and needs.	Ongoing	Virtual	<a href="#">Book Session</a>
Warrior Academy	Intensive training program designed to equip athletes with essential mental performance skills. Stay tuned for dates and registration details.	Ongoing	Virtual	<a href="#">Join Now</a>



## ATHLETE SPOTLIGHT



**CORMAC MCGINNIS**  
**JUNIOR KNIGHTS**



**MEET** Cormac McGinnis, a 12U multi-sport athlete (football/baseball/basketball) from the Chicagoland area who has been making impressive strides in mental performance training. After starting to work with Coach Danny, Cormac has shown incredible commitment and progress, translating the mental skills he has learned into real results on the field.



**STORY:** Cormac's mother shared that the impact from mental performance training has been undeniable. Following his training sessions, Cormac had a standout football game, achieving *three tackles, an interception, and a 25-yard catch*. Building on that success,

he went on to rush over 70 yards, scoring a touchdown that contributed to a Junior Knights win. His coaches have praised him for stepping up as a leader, encouraging him to continue supporting his teammates and be vocal—a new skill he's actively working on in his training.

**GOALS:** This season Cormac is focusing on confidence, motivation, and aggressive play, while developing leadership skills. His mom noted that 1-on-1 training has helped Cormac make more progress in one month than he did over a year with traditional mental health coaching.

## Using Breathing to **WIN**- 3 Key Takeaways



### 1. PHYSICAL BOOSTS ON THE FIELD

Controlled breathing offers physical advantage by increasing oxygen flow to your muscles to help relieve tension, and slow your heart rate. This makes it easier to remain steady under pressure, allowing adrenaline to pass through without overwhelming you. Breathing also helps to lower your center of gravity, which can improve balance and stability- crucial in any sport.

### 2. MENTAL BENEFITS

Beyond physical benefits, breathing is a powerful mental tool. It allows you to reset and center yourself, helping to quiet any inner doubts and keep you focused on the present moment. By slowing down the game mentally, controlled breathing lets you “turn the page” and stay focused on what’s important, even when challenges arise.

### 3. APPLIES IN SPORTS & LIFE

Whether you're stepping into the on-deck-circle, coming set on the mound, or getting ready for the next play, breathing can help you prepare and remain focused. Off the field, these techniques can also lower stress, become part of daily routines, and even help with sleep. Breathing isn't just a tool for game days—it's something you can use anytime to maintain calm and stay focused, whether with family, friends, or in any high-stress situation.