



BRING YOUR MIND TO THE GAME
SPORT PSYCHOLOGY
&
MENTAL TRAINING

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Decentering Protocol

Observe the Thought. Anchor the Body. Execute the Next Action.

Purpose

This protocol is designed to help you step out of anxious thinking in high-pressure moments. Not by fighting your thoughts, but by changing how you relate to them.

When pressure rises, the mind can quickly get trapped inside “**what if**” scenarios. This creates rumination, tightens the body, and pulls attention away from execution.

The goal of decentering is simple:

To notice the thought without becoming the thought.

Instead of being swept away by panic, you learn to observe it, ground yourself, and redirect your focus to the very next action.

You are not trying to eliminate anxiety here.


You are learning to stand beside it, calmly, clearly, and in control.

The Science

When pressure hits, the **amygdala**, the brain’s threat detection system, becomes more active.

It does not distinguish very well between *physical danger* and *psychological threat* like:

- “What if I miss?”
- “What if I fail?”
- “What will they think?”



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Once activated, the amygdala increases:

- Heart rate
- Muscle tension
- Verbal overthinking
- Catastrophic prediction

If unchecked, this leads to **rumination**, getting trapped *inside* the anxious thought instead of observing it.

Decentering works because it:

1. Re-engages the prefrontal cortex (awareness and regulation).
2. Reduces emotional fusion with the thought.
3. Interrupts the rumination loop.
4. Redirects attention toward execution.

You are not trying to eliminate panic.

You are changing your relationship with it.

The Decentering Protocol

Use this the moment pressure rises.


Step 1: Label the Thought (2–3 seconds)

When anxiety appears, do not argue with it.

Do not suppress it.

Do not analyze it.

Simply label it.



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Example:

- “What if I miss?” → **“That’s a thought.”**
- “I’m going to mess this up.” → **“That’s anxiety talking.”**
- “This is too big.” → **“That’s fear.”**

The key shift:

Instead of *being inside the thought*,

you are now *observing the thought*.

You are not saying it is wrong.

You are saying it is a mental event, not reality.

This creates psychological space.

And space reduces emotional intensity.

Step 2: Shift to the Body (Interrupt the Loop)

Now bring attention out of the head and into the body.

Choose one anchor:


- Feel your **feet pressing into the ground**
- Feel your **breath moving in and out**
- Feel your **hands touching your equipment**
- Lightly press **thumb and index finger together**

Stay with that sensation for 1–2 slow breaths.

Why this works:

Rumination lives in verbal thinking networks.

Body awareness activates sensory networks.



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This interrupts the loop.

Not by force.

By redirection.

Step 3: Narrow to the Next Action

Now deliberately shrink your focus.

Not the score.

Not the outcome.

Not what happens if you fail.

Only:

What is the very next action?

- See the target.
- Follow through.
- Strong first step.
- Smooth release.
- One pass.


Execution lives in the present. Anxiety lives in imagined futures.

You return to execution.

What This Protocol Is Training

Repeated use builds:

- Cognitive defusion (not fusing with thoughts)



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- Faster recovery from panic spikes
- Reduced rumination under pressure
- Stronger attentional control
- Identity as a composed performer

You are not trying to become someone who never feels fear.

You are becoming someone who:

- Notices fear
- Observes it
- Grounds the body
- Executes anyway

A Quick Mental Script (In the Moment)

1. "That's a thought."
2. Feel feet. Slow breath.
3. "Next action."

Simple. Short. Repeatable.

Final Note

Thoughts are automatic. Identification is optional. Pressure will come. Panic might visit.

But you do not have to go with it. Observe. Anchor. Execute.

Calm is not the absence of thoughts. It is the ability to stand beside them.

You've trained for this.

Keep going! :)
