

## WHAT IS ATHLETIC TOUGHNESS?

Competitive toughness is the ability to consistently perform toward the upper range of your talent and skill regardless of environment or competitive circumstances.

Toughness is learned. It has nothing to do with genetics. Anyone can get tougher.

Toughness is a skill that enables you to bring all your talent and skill into play on demand. Only through toughness can you discover your absolute limits. The limiting factor for most athletes is not talent but toughness.

Toughness is “Ideal Performance State” (IPS) control. An IPS exists for every athlete. You’ve all been there...in the zone...where everything comes easy. It is the optimal state of physiological and psychological arousal for performing at your peak. You are most likely to access IPS when you feel:

- Confident
- Relaxed and calm
- Energized with positive emotion
- Challenged
- Focused and alert
- Automatic and instinctive

Emotions absolutely affect your performance. Empowering emotions (like the IPS feelings above) enhance performance. Counterproductive emotions (insecurity, weakness, fear and confusion) can effectively lock out your potential. Emotions are biochemical events in your brain that can effect a cascade of powerful changes in your body and can move you either closer or far away from your IPS.

Toughness is the ability to access empowering emotions during competition, particularly during the times when you are scared, uncomfortable or up against a formidable opponent. It is the basis for learning to be a great fighter.

Toughness is mental, physical and – ultimately – emotional. Tough thinking, tough acting, fitness, proper rest, and diet are prerequisites for feeling tough.

## **Conclusion**

Performing toward the upper range of your talent and skill is directly related to your ability to maintain an Ideal Performance State (IPS) during competition. This “toughness” is a learned skill. It is not something you were born with. One of the most powerful forces in your athletic life will be your acquired level of toughness. And ultimately this will serve you well in the greater arena of life.

In the long run toughness and preparation will prevail over talent and physical abilities. Victories in any arena of life will be determined far more by spirit and the ability to fight than by genetic gifts.

Toughness and capacity for fight is formed most powerfully in response to adversity and stress. It is not the good times, the easy or fun times that form strength and resiliency in life or sports.

It’s easy to love winning but you have to love the battle. Love the grinding, the searching, the pushing, the pulling, the hurdles, the problems, the lessons, the battle itself, and certainly the inevitable victories along the way. And the crazier it gets the more you have to love it. Becoming the best competitor you can be means loving to compete more than winning. Becoming the best you can be at anything means loving the journey – from beginning to end.

Toughness is a journey, not a destination. You never finally arrive, never finally get it, and never really get over the top. You only get stronger or weaker, closer or further away; you only grow or don’t grow. The objective is to continue growing, moving forward, and challenging you to reach beyond and replace weakness with strength.

**How “Athletically Tough” are you? Why do you believe that?**

**What are some things you can do to improve your “Athletic Toughness”?**