



*“Self talk and visualization together really will make a difference – try them and you’ll see”*

## **ALL ZONES – SELF TALK AND VISUALIZATION**

Over the many decades of coaching and playing I have met many players who talk themselves into staying in a scoring slump by criticizing their play with words such as:

- I’m terrible
- I can’t score
- Did you see me miss that chance, what a joke
- I don’t know what’s wrong with me... I’m not playing well

And their body language and actions give the same message with their head down, maybe kicking the boards with their skates on the bench, or banging or breaking their sticks in frustration etc.

This negativity and external demonstration of lost confidence doesn’t help the player moving past the negativity into being confident, not holding the stick too tight and taking actions to solve the issues. Sometimes they start passing too much convinced they won’t score.

The first action is for them to stop all negative talk and self-criticism, and start the “I can and will score, I am good” self-talk with the coach’s help. Coaches need to reinforce this and avoid destructive joking sarcasm.

If it’s a scoring slump I advise the player to visualize all the steps leading up to the great goals he has scored in the past every time his negative feelings arise, particularly at night before he sleeps. I let them know that when pros encounter such slumps and they do, they first of all start to work harder on the ice, they shoot more and go to the net in traffic more to get their own or their team’s rebounds, and they screen for their teammates and pounce on rebounds. Once you decide to get to the net more than usual in these ways goals just start to come eventually.

I also suggest they begin to count their Grade A and AA shots each game as often they aren’t getting many shots as they are not shooting enough or through defencemen’s screens, but rather are trying to take the puck too close to the net, or are being too fine in their shots causing missed nets, or not getting into the Grade A and AA scoring areas enough. I suggest they aim at the outside of a goalies pads or shoulder or skates so if they miss their target they will get rebounds or hit the hole perfectly, not miss the net. Once they start getting more shots coaches can use this positive result to identify the improvement as support for saying now you are getting more opportunities to score, you will.



If they get a rebound in tight to the opposition's goalie, the tendency for an anxious player in a slump is to madly slash at the puck trying to knock it in low when the goalie is down, when the best play would be to stay composed and loft the puck to the top shelf. Talk about this tactic.

In addition I suggest they watch the other team's goalie attentively during the game while he's on the bench for up and down butterfly style, side to side movements, what his strengths and weaknesses are and develop a plan for what he will do if he gets a good Grade A scoring chance.

These coaching tactics can apply to any player in any position, not just scoring slumps.