



## *Steve Nash and the Imaginary Free Throw*

Every time Steve Nash goes to the foul line, he shoots five or six free throws. Sure, there's the two that really count, but the NBA's all-time free throw percentage leader always takes several imaginary shots before getting the ball. He says it helps him not only visualize the ball going through the net but also gets his brain and body prepped for the upcoming motor skill. After almost 3,400 regular season attempts, his **90.4%** success rate seems to work. According to basketball coach and sport science Ph.D. candidate Brian McCormick, players need to use a pre-performance routine to prepare their brain:

“A pre-performance routine accomplishes three main physical goals:

1. Stabilizes the motor pattern
2. Adds consistency
3. Establishes a rhythm

When Steve Nash attempts his practice shot, he uses the Imaging step. Rather than pure visualization, where a player may imagine a previous made shot, Nash adds the kinesthetic element. He imagines the ball going through the basket, but he also feels the shot.”

McCormick credits Nash's pre-shot process, kept identical for every attempt:

“When Nash takes a pre-practice shot without the ball, he is accessing the motor pattern and moving it to the working memory. He stabilizes the motor pattern, so he can retrieve the pattern more quickly and effectively than someone who shoots cold. His routine also rhythmically prepares the movement. Most motor skills have a rhythm to them, and Nash feels the rhythm of his shot during the practice shot rather than shooting the real free throw cold.”

“Visualization is an important tool for me”

Phil Jackson,

(One of the Most Successful Coaches in NBA History & current head coach of Steve Nash)

# "You only achieve what you believe"

## Visualization/Guided Imagery Steps

\*\*One of the best times to do this is just before you go to sleep, or when you wake up in the morning\*\*

- 1) Identify the goal you want to visualize (Making Free throws).
- 2) Find a comfortable place to acquire a deep place of relaxation.
  - a. Eliminate all distractions (e.g. turn off phone, TV, etc.)
- 3) Close your eyes and focus on feeling relaxed
  - a. Repeat the word "relax" to yourself—again and again. Say it slowly and purposefully. Feel more R-E-L-A-X-E-D each time you say it.
  - b. Count down from 1 to 10. As you do so, imagine you're descending a staircase. Each step takes you to a deeper level of relaxation.
  - c. Release any thoughts that come up & imagine watching a giant blank screen in front of you.
    - i. As you notice these thoughts, refocus on the "nothingness" of the empty screen.
  - d. Now, imagine yourself in the situation where you want to improve. Cast the image of you making a free throw on the big screen in front of you.
    - i. Create a picture in your mind of not only the visual, but also the sounds and smells of the environment you will be competing in (Gary Job Corps Gym).
    - ii. Turn it into a movie, featuring you in possession of your DREAM/GOAL. Make it clear & vivid, happy, and exciting.
- 4) Rather than pure visualization, where you imagine a made shot, add the kinesthetic element and also FEEL the shot being made.
  - a. Practice your stance and motion of how you shoot your free throws. Make sure it's the EXACT same stance & motion every time. (e.g. if you spin the ball or dribble twice before shooting free throws make sure to do so every time before shooting)
    - i. If you choose to listen to music while doing this exercise make sure to stick to one song that makes you focus, and remember to play that same song in your mind every time you shoot free throws.
- 5) See yourself happy that you have attained what you wanted. See yourself smiling and happy after reaching your goal. Take a moment to feel the pleasure and excitement of achieving this goal already complete.
  - a. Imagine how that feels?
  - b. What do you say to yourself?
  - c. What are others saying about you?
  - d. How GREAT does it all seem to you?

Say out loud:

Today, I am easily and effortlessly seeing my goal accomplished.

Today, I see myself successful.

Today, I see myself\_\_\_\_\_ (your goal). ← Making my free throws