

# Think, Play, Win: Sports Psych Tips for IL ODP Players

## WEEK 5 – Pressure to Perform & Fear of Mistakes

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### This Week’s Performance Blocker= Pressure to Perform & Fear of Mistakes

Many talented players often feel intense pressure to: impress coaches; earn selection; keep their place on their team This pressure often shows up as:

- Overthinking during games
- Fear of losing the ball
- Avoiding difficult or creative actions
- Playing “safe” instead of playing free

### Some real quotes athletes have said to us about their struggles:

<p><i>“When the game gets intense, my chest gets tight, and I feel like I can’t control anything. I get so nervous that I forget what I’m supposed to do.”</i></p>	<p><i>“As soon as I make one bad play, my brain tells me I’m going to mess up again. I want to stop thinking like that, but it takes over.”</i></p>	<p><i>“When the pressure hits, I stop asking for the ball and just hope the game ends. I don’t trust myself in big moments.”</i></p>
<p><b>Emotional Struggle</b> (Anxiety / Stress Response)</p>	<p><b>Cognitive Struggle</b> (Negative Thoughts / Doubt)</p>	<p><b>Behavioral Struggle</b> (Avoidance / Shutting Down)</p>

Here’s the key truth: **\*\*Pressure isn’t the problem- OUR RESPONSE TO PRESSURE IS\*\***

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## FREE Player Development Resource Guide

Want extra support for this exact challenge?

Players and parents can receive a FREE Player Development Resource Guide focused specifically on helping athletes overcome Pressure to Perform, Fear of Mistakes and Overthinking in games

To receive the guide, simply complete the below form using the link below.

🔗 <https://forms.gle/2ZiAGdgYcQwrTWn46>

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## A Modern Skill: Psychological Flexibility

Instead of trying to “be mentally tough” or mistake-free, high-performing athletes train psychological flexibility. Psychological Flexibility = the ability to notice pressure, accept it, and still take effective action. Core ideas include:

You can feel pressure and still play well	You can make mistakes and still be trusted	You can feel fear and still be brave with the ball
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This week’s tools are about playing with **COURAGE**, not perfection.

Here are practical, high-performance-friendly psychological flexibility tools for players:

Practical Tool for Younger Players “Mistake → Mission”	Practical Tip for Older Players “Courage Over Comfort” Reset
<p><b>What to do:</b> When you make a mistake, immediately give yourself a new mission.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b> Lost the ball? → “Win it back.” Missed a pass? → “Show again.” Missed a shot? → “Press hard.”</p> <p>Simple self-talk: “<b>Next job.</b>”</p> <p><b>Why it works:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Stops overthinking</li> <li>✓ Keeps players engaged</li> <li>✓ Builds confidence through action</li> <li>✓ Teaches players that mistakes are part of the mission — not the end of it</li> </ul>	<p>Pressure often <b>pushes players toward comfortable</b> safer passes, hiding from the ball and/or avoiding risk.</p> <p>Elite players choose courage instead.</p> <p><b>Quick reset question</b> (ask in 2 seconds): “What action matches the player I want to be right now?” Then act:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Demand the ball again</li> <li>● Play forward with purpose</li> <li>● Make the aggressive run</li> <li>● Defend on the front foot</li> </ul> <p><b>Why it works:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Shifts focus from outcomes to identity</li> <li>✓ Keeps decision-making clear under pressure</li> <li>✓ Reinforces trust from coaches</li> <li>✓ Builds a performance identity, not a perfection identity</li> </ul>

## Why Does This Build Psychological Flexibility?



These tools train players to:

Notice pressure without panicking	Accept mistakes without spiraling	Choose effective action anyway
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That's psychological flexibility and it's a skill that separates players at the highest levels.

### Parent Tip: “Model Calm, Not Control” at home.

“Praise Courage, Not Clean Performances” After games or training....

Avoid focusing only on:	Instead, look for:	Helpful questions to ask:	Why this helps:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Goals scored</li> <li>-Mistakes</li> <li>-Playing time</li> </ul>	<p>Courage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Trying again after a mistake</li> <li>✓ Asking for the ball under pressure</li> <li>✓ Responding positively to feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Where did you show bravery today?”</li> <li>-“What did you do after something didn't go your way?”</li> <li>-“What's one moment you'd handle the same again?”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Reduces fear of mistakes</li> <li>✓ Builds internal confidence</li> <li>✓ Supports healthy risk-taking</li> <li>✓ Aligns home support with elite development principles</li> </ul>

### Remember

It's not about playing without mistakes. It's about playing through them.

Let's Think. Play. Win.

#ThinkPlayWin #TrainYourBrain #PsychologicalFlexibility #ILODP #PlayWithCourage