

## Week 9-Think, Play, Win: Sports Psych Tips for IL ODP Players

### Growth Mindset & Winning Mentality *Focus (Intensity): Compete. Commit. Improve.*



At the Youth National Team level, talent is expected—**mindset is what separates players**. One of the most important qualities U.S. Soccer looks for is a **Growth Mindset paired with a Winning Mentality**: a continuous drive to improve while fully committing to the competitive demands of the game. At the heart of this quality is **FOCUS (Intensity)**.

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### What Focus (Intensity) Really Means?

Focus is not just “trying hard.” It is the ability to bring **maximum effort, attention, and commitment** repeatedly regardless of circumstances.

It shows up in three key ways:

#### 1. Giving Maximum Effort (Work Ethic)

Elite players don’t switch effort on and off. They sprint to recover, press with intent, and compete for second balls because effort is a standard, not a mood or something to do sometimes. Even on tired legs or in uncomfortable moments, their intensity stays high.

*Effort is controllable. National Team players control it relentlessly.*

#### 2. Concentrating & Staying on Task

Focus means being locked into your role and responsibilities, even when emotions rise, mistakes happen, or the game speeds up. These players reset quickly, stay present, and execute the next action with purpose.

*Distractions steal performance. Focus protects it.*

#### 3. Committing to the Process (Sacrifice)

A growth mindset requires sacrifice—choosing preparation over comfort, discipline over shortcuts, and long-term development over short-term praise. Winning mentality players understand that improvement is earned daily, not granted.

*They don’t ask, “Is this easy?” They ask, “Does this make me better?”*

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### What Focus (Intensity) Looks Like in Action

- Training with intent, not just attendance!
- Competing in every drill, every rep!
- Responding to setbacks with urgency, not excuses!
- Trusting the process even when progress feels slow!

**Remember** Growth mindset fuels **improvement**; Winning mentality fuels **competition** and **FOCUS (Intensity)** connects the two. This is the standard and it’s **trainable, every day!**

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## FOCUS (Intensity)-Practical, On-Field Tips for This Week

FOCUS (Intensity) is built through daily habits, not speeches. Below are simple, age-appropriate actions that players and parents can apply immediately in training and games. Apply these this week, and improvement will follow.

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### For Younger Players (U9–U12) Keep it simple. Keep it fun. Keep it controllable.

#### 1. One Job at a Time

- Before each drill, pick ONE focus (“1st touch,” “Run back fast,” “Call for the ball”).
- Judge success by your effort, not the outcome.

#### 2. 3-Second Rule After Mistakes

- If you make a mistake:  
take one breath → say “Next!” → sprint into your next action.
- No standing, no sulking.

#### 3. Effort Wins

- Coaches notice players who: Sprint back on defense, Chase loose balls and Try again after failing

This week’s challenge: *Can you be the hardest worker on the field for 5 minutes straight?*

Remember: Younger players → **Try hard + reset fast**

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### For Older Players (U13–U19) Raise standards. Sustain intensity. Commit to growth.

#### 1. Intensity Checkpoints

- Pick 3 moments to lock in focus:
  - First 5 minutes
  - After mistakes
  - Last 5 minutesAsk yourself: Did my intensity drop or did my intensity rise?

#### 2. Control the Controllables

- Effort, communication, positioning, reaction speed.
- When pressure hits, narrow your focus to your next action, not the scoreboard.

#### 3. Compete the Process

- Train how you want to play: Sharp transitions, Match-speed decisions and Purposeful movement off the ball

This week’s challenge: *Be the player whose intensity looks the same in minute 1 and minute 60.*

Remember: Older players → **Sustain intensity + trust the process**

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### For Parents Support focus-don’t steal it.

#### 1) Praise Effort, Not Outcomes

- Replace: “Great goal!”
- With: “I loved how hard you worked after losing the ball.”

#### 2) Use Reset Language

- After mistakes, say: “Next action.” “Stay with it.”
- Avoid coaching instructions from the sideline.

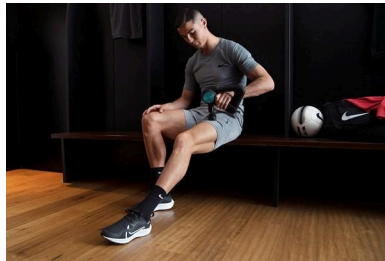
#### 3) Reinforce the Process at Home

- Ask after games:
  - “What did you stay focused on today?”
  - “When did you have to reset your effort?”

This week’s challenge: Be calm, consistent, and supportive-especially when things go wrong.

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# How the Best Use FOCUS (Intensity) to Raise Their Game



## Cristiano Ronaldo (Relentless Effort & Task Focus)

**What stands out:** Cristiano Ronaldo's game has always been built on **maximum effort and laser-sharp concentration**, especially away from the ball.

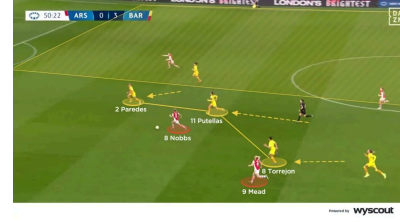
### How he uses FOCUS (Intensity):

- **Work ethic:** Known for sprinting back defensively and attacking the box repeatedly, even late in matches. His intensity doesn't drop when others tire.
- **Staying on task:** If he misses a chance, he doesn't disengage. His next run is often harder and more aggressive.
- **Commitment to process:** His longevity is no accident. Daily habits (sleep, nutrition, extra training) show long-term sacrifice for short-term discomfort.
- **Relentless Off-the-Ball Movement:** Ronaldo's focus isn't limited to moments on the ball. He constantly repositions, checks defenders, and attacks space, even when play isn't coming his way. That sustained mental and physical intensity forces defenders to stay locked in one lapse and he's gone!!
- **Late-Game Intensity:** In many big matches, Ronaldo's most explosive sprints come late in halves or late in games. While others protect energy, his focus sharpens anticipating crosses, attacking rebounds, and committing fully to decisive moments.

### Key Takeaway for players:

You don't need to score every chance but you must attack the next action with full intensity.

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## Alexia Putellas (Calm Intensity & Elite Concentration)

**What stands out:** Alexia Putellas plays with a **quiet but ruthless intensity**. Her focus shows in how consistently she stays connected to the game.

### How she uses FOCUS (Intensity):

- **Concentration:** Constant scanning before receiving allows her to play faster than opponents without rushing.
- **Staying on task:** Even under heavy pressure, she sticks to her role controlling tempo, protecting possession, and choosing the right moments to attack.
- **Process over praise:** After returning from injury, her focus was on daily improvement, not instant dominance.
- **Scanning Before Receiving:** Putellas scans repeatedly before the ball arrives, allowing her to play one-touch or two-touch under pressure. This level of concentration reduces panic and increases speed of play a hallmark of elite midfielders.
- **Defensive Intensity Through Positioning:** Her focus isn't just attacking. She consistently cuts passing lanes, times her press, and recovers shape, often without making flashy tackles. That requires discipline, patience, and commitment to the team process.

### Key Takeaway for players:

Intensity doesn't always look loud-sometimes it looks calm, prepared, and fully present.

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