

Ball State Sport & Exercise Psychology

Ball State Athletics Source for Mental Training Information

March 2011

Issue 2

March Madness is like a Balance Beam

Success will come to teams with grounded beams.

March is here-- let the Madness begin. It is a thrilling month for basketball players, coaches, universities, and fans alike. March can be as exhilarating as walking a balance beam, with the question being: which team will keep their beam grounded throughout the NCAA tournament?

Before we talk basketball-- imagine your task is to walk across a balance beam lying on the ground. No problem, right? Now, the balance beam is suspended 100 feet in the air. Do you envision yourself walking down the beam with ease or does the thought of falling 100 feet make the task much more difficult? Most would probably refuse to walk the beam in the air, even if they easily walked across the exact beam on the ground. However, when the beam is in the air, the process of simply walking is dismissed. The possible outcome of falling becomes the focus.

Obviously the balance beam is an analogy to March Madness. During the NCAA tournament, players manage the height of their own mental balance beam through proper thinking and control of their minds. Players and teams caught up in the pressure of the competition and

consumed by the final results will find themselves walking a raised beam.



Ball State Women's Basketball Celebrating their MAC Championship Victory

Success will come to the teams that focus on the task at hand and stay in the present moment, walking with one foot in front of the other. Their beams will be grounded and they will be able to confidently execute their game plan, without fear of falling. If during competition players' minds wander and become result oriented, they must refocus and take control of their thoughts.

Teams that enter the postseason result oriented have suspended their beams in the air, making it more challenging to stay focused on the task. They will risk falling off their raised beams. Teams that enter the postseason task oriented will keep their beams grounded and have greater success.

As one of the greatest NBA basketball coaches in history, Phil Jackson, asserts: "Approach the game with no preset agendas and you'll probably come away surprised at your overall efforts."

"Get lost in the moment; not caught."

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