

# Critical Importance of “Feeling Good” on the Field



The Critical Importance of “Feeling Good” on the Field - Written By **John Michael Kelly**

A concept that I will be covering a lot in 2014, and is an integral part of my next book, is that when an athlete feels good she plays better.

That may be a common sense statement but there is so much emotionally brewing below the surface that has to be in place for the “feeling good” part to happen.

Additionally the more often an athlete can be in her “emotional sweet spot” the more consistent her on the field performance will be and the more she will enjoy playing the game.

In the simplest of terms, how your athlete feels in any given moment, game or day is an absolute predictor of how she will perform.

To that end, as the messenger I’m here to tell you that all the hitting lessons and practice in the cage, all the fielding reps and all the pitching lessons will NOT guarantee your athlete will ever play to her potential...particularly when it matters most (big game, in front of college coaches) unless she FEELS GOOD.

University of Arizona Head Softball Coach Mike Candrea often says that in order for a girl/woman to play good she has to feel good (conversely boys, Candrea says, need to play good to feel good).

I will agree with Coach Candrea in that the male ego often drives male athletes to judge their performance more harshly than female athletes do theirs. However the female athlete, in my experience, brings much more emotion to the game and, as such, can more easily sabotage her game day performance if those emotions are not channeled productively.

**So, more specifically, how and why does feeling good so impact game performance?**

1. Feelings are the result of thought patterns; some more intense than others.
2. For a female athlete her emotions often reflect how she feels about herself in relation to the experience or action triggering the emotional state she is in.
3. When an athlete is in emotional balance she is able to keep her mistakes and performances that fall short of expectations in healthy perspective.
4. This emotional balance (feeling good) allows for heightened focus, positive energy, elevated confidence and an overall feeling of certainty and well being.
5. A lack of emotional balance can lead to an unhealthy judgment of performance; a mental fixation on mistakes or performances that fall short (and can erode self-esteem).
6. A lack of emotional balance creates thoughts then feelings of doubt and uncertainty; anxiety...leading to diminished focus, confidence, energy and well being.
7. In the heat of the game younger athletes can fall prey to drastic shifts in their emotional state unless they possess the understanding and tools to shift and pivot back into a feeling good mode.
8. Inconsistent play is the result (effect) of the emotional roller coaster (cause) ride younger athletes experience from moment to moment.
9. Most younger athletes are victims to their emotional states because they do not possess the skills to understand the true power they actually do have over their thoughts and emotions.
10. Many athletes easily blame their poor play on their emotions. They may be right but unless they change their mental approach to their game the results will remain the same.

**What can you do as parent or coach to help improve your athlete(s) feel good state?**

1. Help your athlete by reducing the pressure you put on her with elevated expectations and being critical of her performance (you'd be surprised how emotionally impactful just one critique can be from parent or coach in the mind of a teen).
2. Help your athlete to shift her focus from the results of her performance to the effort given.
3. Cultivate with your athlete the power she has to control her thinking, which in turn will allow her to more effectively manage her emotional states.

4. Encourage your athlete to revisit her goals and motivation for playing the game. Long travel seasons can wear down a younger athlete emotionally. Remembering “why” she plays the game, why she loves the game will help keep her in that emotional sweet spot.
5. Encourage your athlete to practice some form of mental imagery to both remember past successes as well as rehearse future successes.
6. Prep your athlete for the inevitable adversity that will hit her during a game or weekend. Her emotional response will determine her success or failure after the adversity. The more your athlete is mentally prepared for this the quicker she will pivot to the desired state of emotional balance.
7. Encourage your athlete to practice keeping her thinking in the present moment, instead of focusing on past mistakes or the worry of future mistakes. Only in this present moment awareness can your athlete summon the focus and energy needed for athletic success.
8. Encourage your athlete to shift her mindset from “attacking” the game to “allowing” the game to come to her (you’ll need to read my new book to fully comprehend this!).
9. Focus your athlete on the distinction between those factors in her game she can and cannot control. Be recognizing the difference she will be able to maintain emotional balance more easily on the field in times of potential stress.
10. Encourage your athlete to explore her emotions before, during and after the game. As she becomes more aware of the different emotional states she experiences she will be more able to begin managing them.

As parent or coach start spending more time in 2014 helping your athlete to feel good about themselves and their game and you will no doubt witness more consistent and better results on the field.

Credit to Gary Leland, of Fastpitch.TV and link to [\*\*http://Fastpitch.TV\*\*](http://Fastpitch.TV)