



TRAIN LIKE STORM

POSITIVE MINDSET & CONFIDENCE UNDERSTANDING YOUR CONFIDENCE

Confidence can have a big influence on the way you train, compete and respond when things don't go to plan. But being confident doesn't mean believing you're the best player on the court, never feeling nervous or never making mistakes.

In this resource, you'll learn what confidence actually means in sport, where it can come from and why it can change. You'll also explore how your mindset, self-talk and attention can influence the way you respond to challenges, and how visualisation can be used as another tool to support your preparation and performance.

By understanding these ideas, you can start to recognise what builds your own confidence and develop strategies you can use at training, during games, and when things don't go to plan.

What Is Confidence?

In sport psychology, sport-confidence has been described as the degree of certainty an athlete has about their ability to be successful in sport.

Importantly, confidence isn't something you either have or don't have. It can change depending on the skill, situation, and even the day.

You might feel confident bringing the ball down court but less confident taking a shot. You might feel comfortable performing a skill at training but nervous attempting the same thing under pressure in a game. You can even be a very capable athlete and still experience moments of doubt.

Feeling nervous doesn't automatically mean you aren't confident either. You can feel nervous about an important game while still believing in your ability to perform.

Confidence can change, and it can be developed.



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Confidence & Skill Aren't The Same Thing

Although they're connected, confidence and your current skill level aren't exactly the same thing. Your current skill level is about what you can currently do. Confidence is about what you believe you can do.

This means you can be skilled at something and still doubt yourself. You can also feel very confident about something you're still learning.

The goal isn't necessarily to feel as confident as possible all the time. Instead, we want to develop well-founded confidence: self-belief that is increasingly supported by your preparation, learning, experience and the skills you've developed.

That's where building confidence becomes something you can actively work on.

Where Does Confidence Come From?

If someone asked you where your confidence comes from, what would you say?

You might think about playing well in your last game or knowing that you're good at a particular skill. But research into sport-confidence suggests that athletes can draw confidence from many different places.

Sport psychologist Dr Robin Vealey and her colleagues identified nine different sources of sport-confidence. Some of these will probably feel more important to you than others, and the sources you rely on may change depending on the situation.



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Mastery – Seeing yourself learn, improve, and successfully perform skills. This could be finally getting something you've been working on, noticing that a skill is becoming more consistent, or recognising how far you've come.

Demonstrating Ability – Moments where you have an opportunity to show what you can do, particularly in comparison or competition with others.

Physical & Mental Preparation – Knowing you've trained, prepared your body, and thought about how you want to perform. Feeling ready can give you something to trust when you step onto the court.

Physical Self-Presentation – Feeling good about your physical condition and how you present yourself as an athlete. This might include feeling fit, strong, comfortable and ready in your body.

Social Support – Encouragement and belief from the people around you, including teammates, family, friends and others who support your netball.

Coaches' Leadership – Confidence you gain from your coach's guidance, feedback, encouragement, and belief in your ability.

Learning From Others – Seeing another athlete perform a skill or handle a situation can sometimes help you believe that you can learn to do it too.

Feeling Comfortable In Your Environment – Familiarity with where you're training or competing and feeling comfortable in the environment around you.

The Situation Around You – Sometimes circumstances can influence how confident you feel. You might feel more confident because a match-up suits you, your team has prepared well for an opponent, or something happening in the game feels favourable.



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The important thing to notice is that your confidence doesn't have to depend on just one of these sources.

Imagine you have a game where you don't perform as well as you hoped. If your confidence comes entirely from your most recent performance, it might take a big hit. But that one performance doesn't erase the training you've done, the skills you've developed, the feedback you've received, the challenges you've already handled, or the people who believe in you.

The same applies when you're learning something new. You might not have successful performances to draw on yet, but you can still recognise that you've prepared, notice small improvements, use your coach's feedback, learn from others, and remember other difficult skills you've successfully developed.

Understanding where your confidence comes from gives you more places to look when you need it.

Build The Evidence

Rather than thinking about confidence as something you simply need to feel, it can be helpful to think about the evidence you're building.

Every time you practise a skill, notice an improvement, work through something difficult, use feedback, or respond well after making a mistake, you're learning something about what you're capable of. Over time, these experiences can give you more reasons to trust yourself.

That doesn't mean telling yourself *"I'm amazing at this"* when you don't believe it. Your confidence can come from much more realistic thoughts, such as *"I've practised this"*, *"I'm improving"*, *"I know what I need to do"* or *"I've handled difficult moments before and I can reset and go again."*



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Your preparation can't guarantee that everything will go perfectly, but it can give you something to draw on when things become difficult.

You Don't Have To Wait To Feel Confident

Sometimes we think confidence needs to come first: *"Once I feel confident enough, I'll try it."*

But experience can also help build confidence. Attempting something, practising it, learning from what happened and trying again gives you new information about what you can do.

There will be times when you need to attempt something while you're still nervous or unsure. You don't have to eliminate every doubt before taking action.

Sometimes confidence helps you act. Sometimes taking action helps you build confidence.

Growth Mindset: Your Ability Can Develop

It's highly likely you've already heard about growth mindset and fixed mindset. Whether the terms are familiar or completely new to you, they're particularly useful when thinking about your development as an athlete.

A fixed mindset is the belief that your abilities are mostly fixed and have limited potential to change. In sport, this can show up when we turn something we're finding difficult right now into a statement about what we're capable of, such as: *"I'm not a good shooter", "I can't defend" or "I'm terrible at long passes."*

A growth mindset is the belief that your abilities can develop through learning, effort and experience. It doesn't mean pretending you're already good at something or ignoring the areas of your game that need work. In fact, being able to honestly identify those areas is an important part of improving.



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Instead of *"I'm not a good shooter"*, you might recognise that *"my shooting is something I'm still developing."* Instead of *"I can't defend"*, you might identify that *"my defensive footwork needs more work."*

The difference is that one statement treats your current ability as the answer, while the other treats it as information you can use to your advantage.

This is particularly important when you assess your own skills. Throughout your development as an athlete, there will be times when you're asked to look honestly at where your skills are currently at. If you decide a particular skill isn't as strong as you'd like it to be, that isn't a judgement of your potential. It's a starting point for deciding what to work on next.

For example, if you rated one of your skills as a 4 out of 10, instead of thinking *"I'm only a 4"*, you could ask: *"What can I work on to move towards a 5?"*

Your current ability tells you where you're starting from. It doesn't tell you where you're capable of finishing.

What Are You Saying To Yourself?

Self-talk is the internal conversation you have with yourself. Sometimes you're very aware of it, while at other times it happens almost automatically.

Imagine you throw a pass during a game and it's intercepted. Your immediate thought might be, *"That was terrible. I'm playing so badly."* If you continue thinking about the mistake, you might hesitate before your next pass, stop presenting for the ball, or still be replaying the turnover in your head while everyone else has moved on to the next contest.



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Now imagine responding to exactly the same turnover with: *"That pass didn't work. Reset, get back into play and focus on the next ball."*

Nothing about the original mistake has changed. What has changed is your response to it and where you're directing your attention next.

Research has found that self-talk can have a positive effect on sporting performance, particularly when athletes learn and practise how to use it.

In other words, helpful self-talk is another skill you can practise.

Helpful Is More Important Than Positive

Positive self-talk doesn't mean convincing yourself that everything is perfect or making statements you don't believe. Often, the most useful self-talk is simply helpful, realistic and focused on what you can control next.

Self-talk can serve different purposes.

Motivational self-talk can help encourage effort, persistence or confidence, using cues such as *"Keep working"*, *"I've got this"* or *"Next ball."*

Instructional self-talk directs your attention towards something specific you need to do, using cues such as *"Strong hands"*, *"Watch the hips"* or *"Set my feet."*

Which type is useful can depend on what you need in that moment. If you've just made a mistake and feel frustrated, *"Reset. Next ball"* might help you move forward. If you're about to take a shot, *"Set my feet. Breathe. Follow through"* might bring your attention back to your technique.



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This is also why *"I'm the best shooter here"* isn't automatically better self-talk than *"Settle. Set my feet. Follow through."* The second statement gives you something useful to do.

Where Is Your Attention?

Under pressure, it's easy for your attention to move away from the task in front of you. You might start thinking about the score, the mistake you just made, whether you'll miss, what your coach is thinking or what will happen if you lose the ball.

When your attention stays on something that has already happened, or something outside your control, it can make it harder to focus fully on the task happening right now.

You can't always stop distracting or unhelpful thoughts from appearing. What you can practise is noticing them and bringing your attention back to what matters next.

Helpful self-talk can be one way of bringing your attention back to what you can control and what you need to do next. One way of becoming more aware of your self-talk is to think about it in three steps:

Catch It: What am I saying to myself?

Check It: Is this helping me?

Change It: Where would I rather direct my thinking?

You don't need to work through these questions in the middle of a game. The idea is to become more aware of the thoughts that regularly show up, so you can practise more useful responses before you need them.

The goal isn't to stop yourself from ever having a negative thought. It's to become better at recognising when your thinking isn't helping you and intentionally directing your attention towards something more useful.



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See It Before You Do It

Another mental skill used in sport is visualisation, also called mental imagery. This involves mentally rehearsing a skill, movement or situation without physically performing it at that moment.

Despite the name, visualisation doesn't only have to involve what you can see. Mental imagery can include what the movement feels like, what you might hear around you, your body position, and even the rhythm or timing of an action. Using different senses can help make the situation you're imagining feel more realistic.

A shooter might mentally rehearse receiving the ball, feeling balanced, setting their feet, looking at the ring, and completing their normal shooting action. A defender might imagine reading their opponent's movement, moving their feet, timing a contest, and recovering quickly back into play.

You also don't have to imagine a perfect performance.

You can mentally rehearse challenging situations and, importantly, how you want to respond to them. You might imagine making a mistake, feeling nervous or being placed under pressure, then rehearse yourself taking a breath, using your self-talk, communicating with your teammates, and returning your attention to the next contest.

Research suggests that mental imagery can have a positive effect on sporting performance when used as part of an athlete's preparation.

Visualisation isn't a replacement for physical training. Instead, it's another mental skill you can practise and use alongside your physical preparation.



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UNDERSTANDING YOUR CONFIDENCE

Build Your Confidence

Confidence isn't one thought, feeling or technique. What you've learnt in this resource shows that it can be influenced by your preparation, experiences, mindset, self-talk, attention, and the way you reflect on your development.

Not every strategy will work equally well for every athlete. Part of developing as an athlete is learning what works for you.

Train It – Use practice, learning, and feedback to build evidence that you're developing.

See It – Mentally rehearse skills, situations, and how you want to respond.

Say It – Use self-talk that is realistic, helpful, and directs your attention towards what you want to do.

Reflect On It – Notice what you're learning, where you're improving, and what you want to continue working on.

Trust It – When it's time to perform, trust the preparation you've put in.

Confidence isn't about knowing everything will go your way. It's about developing reasons to trust yourself while knowing you can continue learning and improving.

Research Behind This Resource

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