



It is the holy grail, the secret sauce and the end all in athletic performance. Hundreds of books and lectures describe the experiences of athletes trying to and, at times, finding this timeless state of being that allows the game to become easy and without conscious thought. The zone, the flow, mindfulness.

Call it what you want but athletes know when they are in it and performance coaches spend careers trying to unlock the path to this state of no thought and high performance. All coaches have different ways to "free up" athletes to play with this feeling. Athletes themselves often find their own ways to quiet the voices and slow time down so decision making and reacting become simple.

Buddy Biancalana, the former Royals shortstop and co-author of *The 7 Secrets of World Class Athletes* provided insight on this state of mind for athletes.

"When an athlete is in the zone, the motion becomes fluid and, for the most part, effortless. You feel as if you have more time, you don't feel rushed, your motion is very fluid and the timing is excellent or even perfect," Biancalana said. "Three things are essential for all of this to occur, two of which I learned from Dr. Fred Travis, the Director of the Center for Brain, Consciousness, and Cognition.

"The signals or information you're processing must get to the cerebellum uninterrupted by the prefrontal cortex, and the athlete must generate intention from a quieter state of mind. This is done through a process of thinking various cues such as numbers. In addition, mechanics must include the kinematic sequence. The brain-body connection is a two-way street. My experience in working with athletes in many professional sports is, if there is weakness in the kinetic chain, processes in the brain necessary for zone motion will break down. An athlete can still have some success, without the kinematic sequence, however for full ability to surface consistently and for maximum force to take place as safely as possible, both the kinematic sequence and zone motion must occur.

"The current baseball training model is incomplete, thus the reason for slow development, inconsistency of performance and the high rate of soft tissue injuries. In order for an athlete to play their best, there can never be a time in which the processes in the brain are not the priority. The brain is the operating system to the muscles.

"The integration of the mechanics with the brain in the correct state to allow the motion to get stored and consistently accessed, is what sets zone motion apart. The work must take place on the field. When a player is accessing zone motion, it feels as if they are not thinking. It is similar to someone who drove a car for 20 minutes and can't remember much about the drive, yet they were very alert as they were driving safely to their destination."

*The 7 Secrets of World Class Athletes*, as Biancalana describes them, are listed below in descending order.

1. The fluid motion factor: Accessing and generating a thought from a quiet state of mind and allowing signals to get to the cerebellum uninterrupted by the prefrontal cortex.
2. Sports as a series of gaps: What's essential in order for an athlete to experience zone motion is to experience parts of the motion in an abstract state, one in which they are almost not aware of what they're doing. One part begins before motion, and the other part is at any point where there is a slight pause or change of direction in the motion.
3. Quality of the gap determines the quality of the motion: To a large degree, the gap determines the motion. However, once again, the mechanics are very important. If the kinetic chain is not intact, then zone motion cannot occur. Flow can occur, but not zone motion.
4. World class athletes do not react to information before it is necessary: Being able to make a last split adjustment or decision is essential in order to performing your best.
5. World class athletes consistently bury the DNA goal: The DNA goal is the embedded goal in the sport. "Throw the strike, drive in the run." My EMG (electromyography) research and anecdotal evidence has shown that anytime a physical mechanic or desired result becomes the priority, muscles don't fire harmoniously thereby leading to an increased chance of musculoskeletal injuries.
6. World class athletes consistently use the law of least action: When an athlete is playing their best, it's simple. They feel as if there is little effort taking place, yet they achieve the desired results.
7. An inverse relationship exists between strong intention and execution: Any athlete, whether professional, amateur or a weekend warrior, knows that the harder they try, the worse they do. A form of effortless effort must occur for peak performance.

Zone Motion training takes place on the field by working at the intersection of the mental and physical. It is complimentary to current on-field and off-field coaching and mental skills training. Players are progressively taught cues and drills such as numbers to think at various points of their motion depending on their state of being.

For performance coaches, the need to expand insight and realize the many strategies that are available to share with athletes is crucial. The industry, at times, has become a one-trick pony, one tool fits all. Supporting and coaching athletes at all levels requires insight and vision beyond the traditional sports psychology paradigm.