



## **STOP USELESS COMPARISON WITH A SIMPLE THOUGHT EXERCISE**

### **Comparing yourself to others is a distraction**

Comparing yourself to others is a problem that every athlete will face. It is a problem because it can be mentally and emotionally detrimental.

Comparison is the default setting for the human mind. One simple reason why it is the default is because you look around and see others everyday. Comparing yourself to others is a distraction. One downside of comparing yourself to others is that you don't develop an understanding of who you are. You develop your self-understanding when you spend time thinking about what's important to you and how you act. Less time spent thinking and acting toward what is important means that, in the long run, you will have a less clear understanding of what is important to you. The same is true about what makes you happy, what makes you improve, and what motivates you. The whole picture of your life becomes unclear. Comparing yourself to others is a trap.

The alternative is to compare yourself to yourself, either in the past or the future. Are you better than you were before? How will you be better in the future than you are today? These are the important questions. This exercise is geared towards giving you a practical method and some ideas of how to compare yourself to yourself.

### **The real reason behind your tendency to compare**

The real reason you compare yourself to others is something that is not unique. It is deeply rooted in your psychology as a person. People are social. That means you reference who you are in comparison to those you see. You compare and then compete to carve out a unique identity based on those in your tribe. You take feedback from others and form your own sense of identity.

On a sports team that means you look to see where it is that you fit in and describe yourself (to yourself) based on what you see and what others tell you about yourself. Are you one of the most talented? One of the hardest working? One of the smartest? One of the most likable? All of these

things are relative to your teammates. Here is the uncomfortable truth: eventually, you will not be the most talented/hardest working/smarter/most likable player around. As competition gets higher and as life goes on, comparing yourself to others puts more demands on yourself.

So many athletes go wrong here. You could get discouraged if you discover that you're no longer the hardest working athlete or you could spend all your energy competing with others to once again become the hardest working athlete. You have a stereotype of what success will look like in your mind. If you compare yourself to others who fit that stereotype, you are really only pursuing becoming that stereotype. You are not pursuing success or the person that you want to be.

The goal of this guide is to take your first steps away from comparing yourself to anyone other than who you used to be and who you will be in the future.

## **The effects of negative comparison**

The worst consequence of comparison is that you are too distracted to do any critical thinking about yourself. You are so focused on where you fit in, that you forget to look at where you are. It is especially damaging to your confidence to always be comparing yourself to people you see as 'better'. This is called negative comparison because you are putting yourself as less than someone else. Negative comparison means that you are focusing on what it is that others do or have that you do not. This can happen in the present or the for your future plans. It's hard to see yourself going very far if you see everyone around you as more likely to succeed. If you are too distracted to think about where you are going, you risk never getting anywhere at all.

Does what anyone else does have influence your success in any way at all? No. What influences your success is what you have and what you do. The same applies for the mindset you take to your sport. No one else can be happy, focused, personable, calm, and motivated for you. You have to find a way to do it in your life. Looking to others for inspiration is great, but looking at others to see how much better they have it is damaging. It's risky to build your whole self-image on other people, because other people will always come and go. You will always be with yourself.

Look at where you are. Be real with yourself. Think about what skills you have. Think about the characteristics that will make you successful. Then think about how those skills and characteristics are changing over time. Where were you a week ago, a month ago, a year ago? How far have you come? If you've come this far, where can you go in the next year?

## **Comparison machine: social media**

In modern times, you not only compare yourself to those you are in direct contact with but also everyone you observe on social media. The trap becomes stronger the more force it has to stop you from focusing on your life.

There is evidence that social media use is related to experiencing more mental distress. The more you are on social media, the more likely it is that you feel poorly. This does not mean that social media causes mental health disorders. It could be that you have certain problems and you use social media

to make yourself feel better, even as a temporary distraction. Or it could be that the comparisons you make subconsciously while on social media truly hurt the way that you think about your life.

There is also a study that showed that passively scrolling through social media is worse for mental health than actively engaging in sharing and messaging with others. The point is to use social media to connect with people and ideas. It is not a tool to compare yourself negatively with others, but it works like this unintentionally. You think to yourself, "this player just committed to a college I wanted to go to, but that school won't even talk to me." If you want a college commitment from there too, it has to happen in the future. So don't spend extra time dwelling on how someone else got something you want today. The game is not over, just because someone reached a milestone moment.

You should use social media for connecting with others, learning, and growing your own game. Social media is not the bad guy here—it is just how you use it. Just like whether or not you choose to focus on comparison with your teammates and direct competition or on comparing yourself to yourself. Don't compare your work with other people's milestones.

## How to compare yourself to others

Social comparison is a natural tendency that you can learn to use for your own benefit. You must understand how to use it as a tool and how not to. Think about evaluating your abilities. You see a highlight of another player. Ask, can I make a play like that? What do I need to practice? You think how does he set up the move? How does she execute? This type of social comparison can teach you something actionable about yourself. You can improve your game using the ideas that others have.

In the AthleteDISC, high S athletes tend to learn through being reflective. That means they might benefit more from watching other players practice or play. For them, it is less about comparison of who they are and more about comparing what they are doing. High C athletes tend to take the same outlook, preferring to understand the other player's process. High D and high I athletes may tend to negatively compare themselves more if what they see is better than their current level. For high D and high I athletes, their motivating factors are uniquely set up for wanting to be respected for their abilities. If this is you, you may tend to feel badly comparing yourself up.

## Your life compared to itself

You improve yourself most (as an athlete and as a person) when you compare yourself to yourself. That means you must understand yourself. The more you know about yourself, the more easily you will be able to compare your behavior over time. Self-understanding will also make it easier to compare yourself to others without suffering from the trap of feeling like you are worse than others. You and everyone else in your sport are just people—and that means you are different.

Why compare yourself with others for any reason except learning or growing as a person? Every other comparison you can make is useless to you.

When you as an athlete practice comparing yourself to what you were like in the past, you are creating a healthy distraction for your natural tendency to compare negatively to others. You take a natural tendency and shift it to something more useful: you start to notice how you can grow as a player and a person.

Plus, there is a benefit to truly focusing on yourself: you improve faster because you don't have to work blindly any more. Ask, what actions can I take that would make the biggest impact on who I am as a person? Instead of working hard on the same old things and expecting different results, you can work on exactly what will make you grow.

## Conclusion

If you have enjoyed this guide or found it useful in any way, please do not hesitate to share it with friends or family. This guide is part of a series of free resources that My Mental Game will be offering throughout the calendar year 2023.

Be sure to sign-up for our email newsletter at [www.mymentalgame.com/newsletter](http://www.mymentalgame.com/newsletter) to never miss an opportunity for our free mental training guides.

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## Exercise: how to compare yourself to yourself

The goal of this exercise is to get you to think about what triggers you to negatively compare yourself to others. Often, these are things that you yourself are insecure about. When you encounter this thing in your sport, it will automatically create thoughts like, "I'm not as good as him" or "I'm going to get noticed in a bad way in this group, I don't belong here".

Negative comparison is a natural tendency of all people. For athletes, it is easy because your abilities and characteristics are constantly being evaluated, so you learn to evaluate yourself and others (it's all right there for everyone to see on the field/rink/court).

**List 3-5 examples of things that you notice that lead to a negative comparison.**

At first, it may be difficult to notice when you are comparing yourself negatively and then to figure out what led to the thought. If this is you, set a goal to notice your self-talk. When your self-talk is a negative comparison, take a second to think about what happened just before that. You can return to this exercise after a practice if it is difficult to complete today.

Fill in the table below with some examples.

<b>Negative comparisons I make</b>
Ex. Noticing the way my teammates warm-up makes me feel less prepared because I don't know what I should be doing on my own.

Now that you have begun to think about what causes negative comparisons, you can change the way you see these things. There is a bonus exercise included with your purchase of the Start MMG Package that helps you reflect on your negative comparisons. Write these reflections daily on your phone to learn to dismiss the tendency for negative comparison completely.

To learn more about eliminating negative comparisons and to unlock your performance code, click the link below:

[UNLOCK YOUR PERFORMANCE CODE](#)



### **More about My Mental Game:**

My Mental Game originated from a strong personal desire to provide young athletes and their parents with the necessary tools to navigate the demanding journey of elite-level sports. The company was established by two partners who have personally experienced this journey, and who have combined their expertise in psychology and professional training and development to create a powerful tool. Their aim is to help young high-performance athletes achieve their full potential while prioritizing their mental health and well-being, both during and beyond their athletic careers.