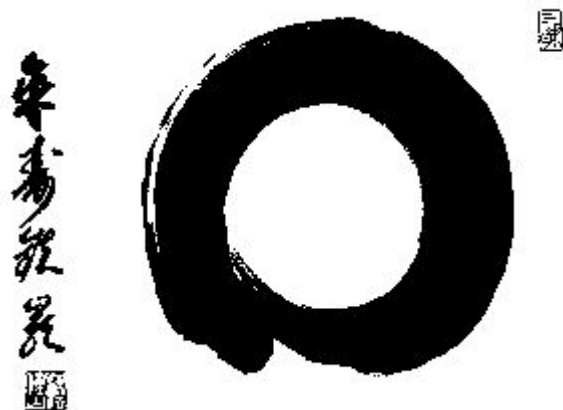


Chi-Power **SPORTS**<sup>TM</sup>

# TRAINING REPORT



## MEDITATION and the **SPORTING ZONE**

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Phrases like peak performance, transcendence, flow and the zone, all refer to the bursts of spontaneous excellence experienced by top athletes, and describe a state where actions are easy, focus is 100% and the player knows instinctively what to do to succeed.

Research shows that skill, passion and immersion equal peak performance – the ultimate experience of which is the flow state or sporting zone.

Action and awareness merge when the athlete becomes totally absorbed in what they are doing – when they have the skills to meet the challenge and focus all of their attention on the task at hand.

Perhaps the most systematic approach that research shows is consistent with achieving the zone, is that used in the martial arts. In Kung-fu, T'ai Chi and Karate the competitor seeks to lose all distractions of ego, analysis and self-referring thoughts, immersing him or herself completely within the activity.

Zazen, the formal practice of seated meditation, is the cornerstone of Zen training. In its beginning stages, Zazen is a practice of concentration, with a focus on following or counting the breath.

In sports, we tend to view the body, breath, and mind separately, but in Zen they come together naturally as one reality. By concentrating on the breath you are empowering yourself with the ability to put your mind where you want it, when you want it there, for as long as you want it there.

By disciplined training, the mind can be re-programmed to acknowledge distractions, whether internal (anxiety, fear of failure, pressure of expectations) or from the environment (crowd noise, other competitors, weather conditions) – without holding on to them or paying them any attention.

The emphasis in Zazen is to breathe naturally, deeply and quietly and simply to be aware of our breathing, while letting all other thoughts, feelings and distractions pass through the mind like clouds moving over-head on a windy day.

### **How to Practise:**

1. Sit upright on a stool or hard-backed chair with your feet firmly on the ground, palms resting on your thighs. Hold the crown of your head up, as if it were held by a hook or thread. Tuck your chin under slightly and relax your shoulders. Look down at the floor or a blank wall about a metre or so in front of you.
2. Once you are comfortable, concentrate your mind at the hara\* or t'an tien – a point inside the lower abdomen, about 2" below the navel.
3. Relax your stomach. Touch your tongue to the roof of your mouth and breathe in and out through your nose. When you breathe in, allow your lower abdomen to come out (expand) gently. Do not force your breath. Just try to relax and let it happen naturally.
4. Relax fully. Do not try to take deep breaths, but just keep your mind on the hara centre for the duration of the exercise and quietly observe your breathing.

\* It is important to centre your attention in the hara. The hara is the well-spring of your physical power and your body's natural centre of gravity. Put your attention there; put your mind there. As you develop your Zazen, you'll become more aware of the hara as the centre of your attentiveness.

## **What to Expect:**

Over time, you will gradually find your breathing becomes deeper and slower. You will also feel heat in the lower abdomen. Start your Zazen practise by concentrating for just a few minutes each day and build up your training gradually. Over time you will find yourself getting physically and mentally stronger and feeling more relaxed.

**DAILY TRAINING** – the ability to achieve a relaxed and focused state of mind needs to be trained and experienced on a daily basis, and is not a technique that can be pulled from the bag on the day of competition. You need to start preparing your mind by learning to detach from all the trivial problems which beset every-day life.

Start gradually by meditating for 5 or so minutes and work up another minute a day until you can sit comfortably in silence for at least 20 minutes.

**IN SKILLS TRAINING/PRACTISE** – here you will be learning how to meditate while in action, and can quietly start training yourself to focus on your breathing while putting on your sports gear, warming-up and during your practise routines.

**DURING GAME/EVENT** – the night before a competition, it's helpful to meditate for a few minutes before going to bed. Sit quietly for a while, without reading or watching the television and then quieten your mind completely by practising Zazen for a few moments. If you feel restless in the night, get up and do some gentle stretching, then sit and meditate for a little while. This will help you relax your nerves again before going back to bed.

In the morning, start with ten minutes of meditation and then do short bursts throughout the day while you get ready and prepare yourself for the event. In the locker-room, you can continue to stay focused on your breathing and perform your Zazen training without anyone knowing what you are doing or being able to distract you.

During the game itself, use your meditation training as a trigger to increase your focus and relaxation during moments of intense pressure. Gently pushing down the diaphragm and sinking your awareness to the hara while exhaling, is a great way to stay strongly present in your body.

### References

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**Jayne Storey** has been training in the Eastern martial and spiritual arts of Chi Kung, Meditation and T'ai Chi since 1987 and is now Europe's leading teacher of these Eastern practices to golfers and athletes from a wide variety of sporting disciplines.

For more information on 1:1 training, products and/or organising an event at your sports venue, please contact:

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