



Inside the Zone

SPORTS PERFORMANCE GROUP, LLC

"You can't control the future but you can prepare for it" – Rob Polishook

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The Yips: Nicknames, Nomenclature and History

BY ROB POLISHOOK, MA, CPC, MENTAL TRAINING COACH

The yips are an athlete's worst nightmare. They seemingly appear out of the blue and have been described as an "out of body experience" in that the athlete is no longer able to perform a formerly simple movement, such as an easy putt, baseball throw, or tennis service toss. The yips usually rear its ugly head under what is perceived as high pressure and maximum tension situations for the performer.

The yips go by many names. Steve Blass, former Pittsburgh Pirates baseball player, named it "the monster." Tom House, former major league baseball pitcher, calls it "the creature." A 14-year-old client of mine who plays catcher called it "a glitch." Fans in New York City named it Sasser-itis based on former New York Mets catcher Mackey Sasser's throwing difficulties.

The omnipresence of the yips crosses all borders, ages, and types of sport: in archery they call it "target panic," in darts they call it "dartitis," and in golf it has been referred to as "twitches," "staggers," "jitters," and "jerks." Further, in Australia, Nick Riewoldt, an Australian Rules football player, was deemed to have the "kicking yips." And in tennis, the media is so dumbfounded with the abundance of double faults in the woman's game they just refer to it as the "serving yips." Perhaps most aptly, Laura Cooke, the mom of one of my clients, referred to it as a "potentially career crippling affliction which can embarrass and madden an athlete".

The nomenclature of the word yip originated between 1400 and 1450. It is a noun and is referred to as a sharp cry or yelp, especially of excitement or delight. Although many athletes who have experienced the yips can relate to the

idea of a sharp cry or yelp of distress, they certainly do not experience delight! The yips lead to a sense of extreme helplessness and frustration. Taking this a step further, I have colloquially created in acronym for the yips - "Yelping In Painful Silence." Or even the OOPS, that is, On again-Off again

Performance Syndrome. My colleagues, Dr. David Grand and Dr. Alan Goldberg, professionally refer to the yips as a Repetitive Sports Performance Disorder (RSPD) or Sports Traumatic Stress Disorder (STSD).

The first recorded case of the yips is attributed to former professional golfer Thomas-Dickson Armour, born September 11th, 1894 from Edinburgh, Scotland. In 1927, he played at the Shawnee Open and is credited with shooting the first ever "archaeopteryx" - this refers to 15 or more over par! He shot this just one week after winning the United States Open.

If you are an athlete struggling with the yips or know someone that is, rest assured, you are not alone. Strange as it may seem, the

yips has been afflicting people of all ages, sports, and countries for many generations. In fact, it is a "silent epidemic." The good news is that the athlete is not broken, nor does their performance need to be fixed. They still possess the skills necessary to perform, however, whatever is blocking them needs to be released from the roots. Subsequently, the person and the athlete will rebound stronger, be more resilient, and perform better than ever. Our work with Mackey Sasser and hundreds of other athletes in all sports is testament to the real possibility of a full and strengthened recovery from the yips.

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Rob Polishook, MA, CPC is the founder and director of Inside the Zone Sports Performance Group. As a Mental Training Coach he works with athletes and teams at the middle school, high school, national, college and professional levels. His work focuses on helping athletes and teams gain the mental edge, often the difference between winning and losing. Rob has spoken to athletes, coaches, parents both nationally at USTA, USPTA, ITA conferences and internationally conducted workshops and worked with top ranked juniors in India, Israel, Switzerland and the Czech Republic. He was awarded the 2008 USPTA - Eastern Division High School Coach of the Year award. Additionally he has published articles in national publications including USTA and USPTA publications. Rob can be contacted about his private or team consultation at 973-723-0314, rob@insidethezone.com, www.insidethezone.com.