

Controlling Anger

ROD GASPAR, A LIFELONG COMPETITOR

Rod Gaspar is a former standout college, minor league and professional baseball player. He has a World Series ring to prove it ('69 N.Y. Mets). Rod is a lifelong competitor and was raised with a tough view of the game—whatever game it happened to be.

QUESTION: How did you prepare physically for your upcoming USHA Four-Wall Tournament matches?

RG: I do 30-60 minutes sessions of intense cardio on an elliptical machine, and played handball 2-3 times a week leading up to the tournament.

QUESTION: How do you prepare mentally?

RG: By the time the tournament starts, I go into it thinking I can beat anyone.

QUESTION: Are these the same psyching techniques you used as a pro baseball player?

RG: Similar. But handball is such a physically demanding game, so it has a different type of mental challenge. The game of handball is relentless mentally and physically. Baseball allows for breaks to gather yourself.

QUESTION: It's a long tournament. At 60 years old how do deal with the physical and mental fatigue?

RG: If you think you're tired, you're tired. Sometimes no matter how hard you try mentally to push past the fatigue you're body says "no." You have to learn to accept that.

QUESTION: What percent of your game is physical and what percent is mental?

RG: I couldn't say, but I do know this: *whoever is mentally tougher is going to win, most of the time.* (See follow up)

QUESTION: How do you stay focused?

RG: It can be difficult in a long ballgame or handball tournament to maintain concentration. My style has always been to take the game head-on and try to get it over as quickly as possible. (See follow up)

QUESTION: How do you usually react if you make a mistake during a game?

RG: Learn from it then move on.

QUESTION: As a serious competitor, do you always compete to be the best?

RG: I just love to compete. It's a fun process. But it's important to realize that you're not going to be the best at everything, in life or athletics.

QUESTION: Where do you get your drive?

RG: Probably from the emotion of anger.

QUESTION: That's a very strong negative emotion.

RG: But you have to learn to control it in sports and in life. Always be fair, honest and gracious in both.

QUESTION: Where does that "anger" come from and where does it go during the game?

RG: It has a lot to do with how I was raised. The times. When I was a kid Harry was "giving them hell" if you know what I mean. I also grew up being the little guy so I've always over-compensated. I don't ever think about whom I'm playing, I'm going to win. I'm confident—I know I will win. And that intimidates the competition.

QUESTION: What mental game techniques do you use to control your competitiveness?

RG: Relaxed Concentration: Practice your skills until they become automatic; mentally rehearse; tune in to anxieties, acknowledge them and move on; teach yourself to breath deep and easy.

[FOLLOW UP. ROD GASPAR'S HANDBALL TEAM LOST IN THE FINALS BY A COUPLE OF POINTS IN THE TIE-BREAKER SET OF A 2 ½ HOUR MATCH.]

QUESTION: You said, "Whoever is mentally tougher is going to win."

RG: Fatigue won. Fatigue took the place of my extra 10% mental edge. Sometimes that's the way it goes. You're "tough" when you can accept that and move on.

QUESTION: what's your most significant realization as a life-long athlete?

RG: The realization of the **gift** I was given to be an athlete. (Not until I became a Christian did I understand about being competitive and not quitting. Christians know what I'm saying.)