

THE LAST FIVE MINUTES BEFORE COMPETITION CAN DETERMINE THE OUTCOME

MADISON, WI – February 2010 – As an Olympic athlete prepares to enter the competition of a lifetime, it is often the last five minutes that determine whether or not they will stand on the podium. Whether the athlete is a returning Olympic champion like speed skating's Apolo Ohno or snow boarder Sean White, or a newcomer to the Olympic Games, the final five minutes is critical to their performance.

“Successful athletes tend to use a structured set of behaviors and thoughts during the final five minutes before a performance,” according to Jack J. Lesyk, Ph.D., a sport psychologist and member of the Association for Applied Sport Psychology. “Athletes need to stay focused immediately prior to competition in order to put their physical skills to work.”

The last five minutes prior to performing can be critical for athletes in focusing their thoughts, emotions and behaviors. While some may use the time to pump themselves up, others use it to calm themselves down. More importantly, athletes need to be productive and do what it takes to get in the correct mindset prior to their performance.

An athlete's focus in those final moments needs to be on powerful and useful ideas. Examples of possible pre-performance routines include physically walking through a program or focusing on key words, such as strong or smooth.

Experts agree that athletes should work on a pre-competition routine and make it part of their program each and every time. It is equally important to keep constancy and not change the routine for more difficult competitions, such as the Olympic Games.

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The Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) promotes the ethical practice, science and advocacy of sport and exercise psychology. Founded in 1986, AASP is an international, multidisciplinary, professional organization that offers certification to qualified professionals who practice sport and exercise psychology. With more than 1,200 members in 28 countries, AASP is a worldwide leader, sharing research and resources with the public via its Web site, www.appliedsportpsych.org.

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