



MENTAL TOUGHNESS IN UNDERWATER RUGBY

Staying composed under pressure, making sound decisions and returning to the game

FOCUS

BREATH

TEAM

Why was this guide created?

From the outside, Underwater Rugby may look like a sport defined only by strength, speed and breath-hold capacity. Yet the decisive moments often unfold in the mind. Within seconds, an athlete must assess the opponent, teammates, the basket, their own breathing and the direction of play - all amid physical contact, reduced sound and rapidly changing positions underwater.

Mental toughness here does not mean never feeling fear or fatigue. It means returning to the next useful action when physical strain and mental pressure rise. That action may be making a pass, surfacing safely or restoring defensive shape after a mistake.

This guide explains the psychological demands faced by Underwater Rugby athletes during matches and training. Its purpose is not to demand constant toughness, but to help athletes recognise pressure, protect safety, maintain team communication and reconnect mentally with the game after a difficult moment.

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What is mental toughness?

Mental toughness is not ignoring discomfort. It is the ability to return attention to a useful target while discomfort continues. In Underwater Rugby, that target is often small: the next passing lane, the route back to the basket, a teammate's position or the decision to surface safely.

TOUGHNESS

- Notices pressure.
- Respects body signals.
- Returns attention to the next task.
- Reconnects after mistakes.

NOT HARDNESS

- It is not hiding pain.
- It is not minimising danger.
- It is not chasing every ball alone.
- It is not delaying a safe ascent.

FLEXIBILITY

- Adapts when plans change.
- Changes role.
- Asks teammates for support.
- Pulls back when needed.

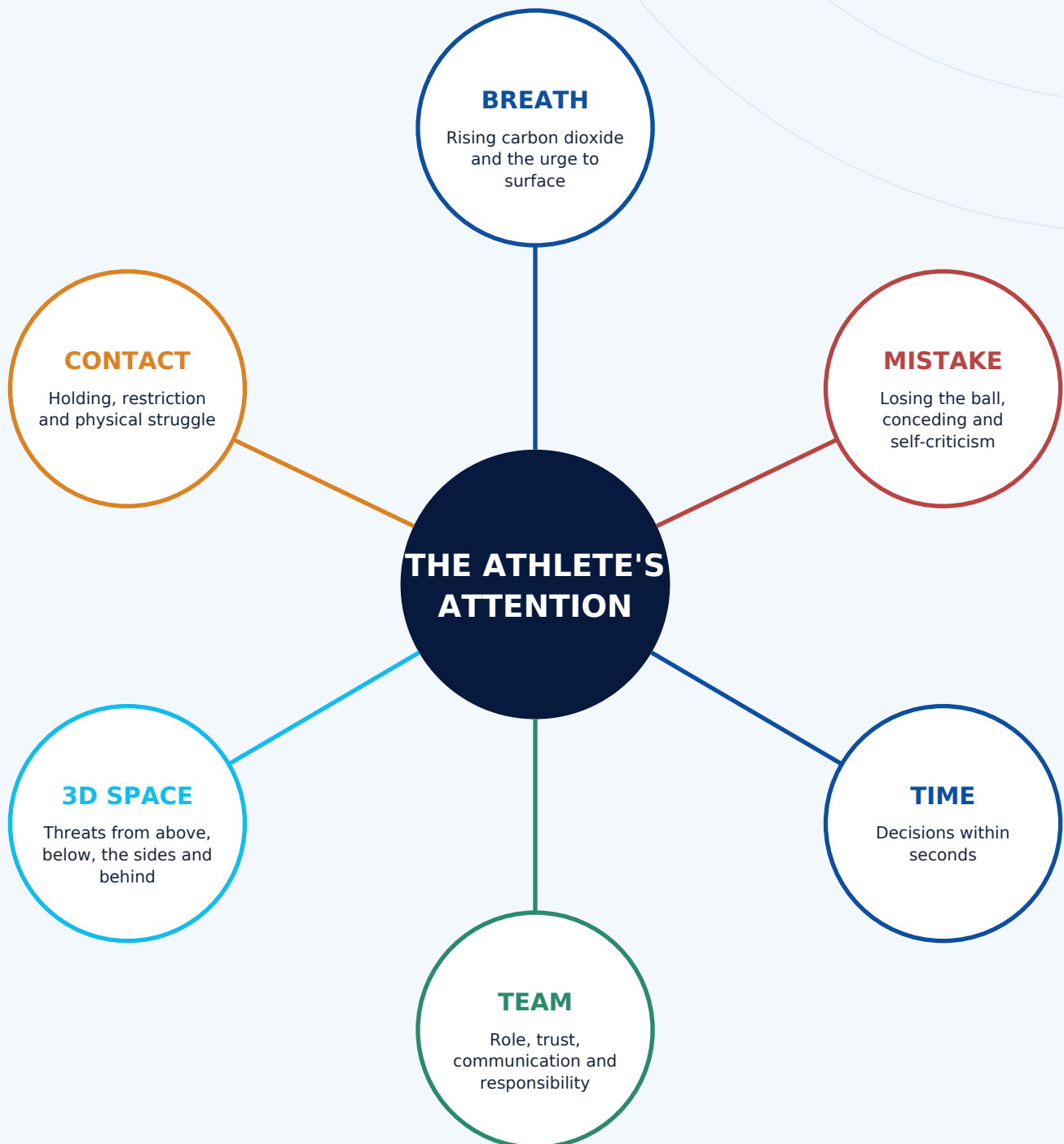
“Strength does not always mean moving forward.”

Sometimes it means stopping at the right time, surfacing and returning to the game.

In sport psychology, mental toughness is understood as a combination of control, confidence, commitment, attention and coping with stress. These skills are not fixed at birth. They can develop through the training environment, coaching language, team culture and the athlete's own inner dialogue.

The pressure map of Underwater Rugby

The psychological load of this sport does not come from a single source. Several pressures may overlap at once. The first step in resilience is identifying which pressure is affecting you.



When pressure rises, decisions slow if the mind tries to solve the entire field at once. Experienced athletes narrow their attention: 'What is the most important information right now?' This question reduces the complexity of the game to one actionable task.

Mental preparation before a match

The aim just before a match is not complete calm. Some activation supports speed and competitive effort. The goal is to bring arousal into a manageable range.

1

CHECK YOUR BODY

Notice excessive tension, dizziness, unusual shortness of breath or pain. Safety comes first.

2

TEK FOCUS CHOOSE

Choose one target for the first shift: defensive positioning, an early pass or a calm ascent.

3

USE A SHORT CUE

"Play the first position." "Stay with the team." "Decide when you see the ball."

4

REMEMBER YOUR ROLE

What does the team need from you? Not chasing every ball, but performing your role on time.

5

ACCEPT ACTIVATION

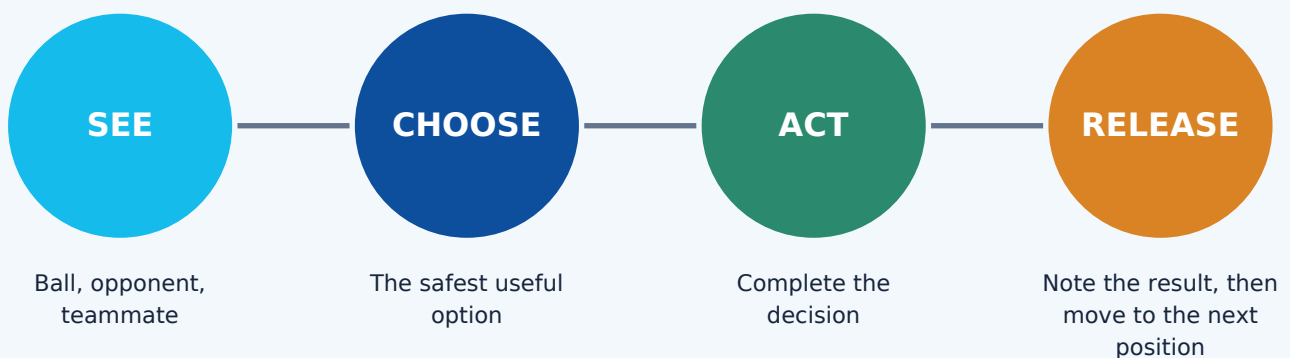
A faster heartbeat does not always mean loss of control. The body may be preparing to compete.

60-SECOND ROUTINE

10 sec body check • 20 sec role reminder • 20 sec single focus • 10 sec team contact

Decision-making under pressure

There is little time for extended thought underwater. Short mental sequences that become automatic through repetition are more useful than complex advice.



EXAMPLE 1 - LOST BALL

The ball slips away. If the mind says 'I failed again', valuable seconds disappear. Instead: See - the opponent's direction. Choose - the defensive line. Act - return to the basket. Release - review the mistake when play stops.

EXAMPLE 2 - BREATH PRESSURE

The phase lasts longer and the need to surface increases. See - the body signal. Choose - a safe ascent. Act - release or pass the ball. Release - recover without getting stuck in 'I could not handle it'.

The key to better decisions is not thinking faster, but reducing unnecessary thought. Short routines return attention from the outcome to the task.

Breath pressure, anxiety and safety

Discomfort during breath-holding is expected in Underwater Rugby. As carbon dioxide rises, the urge to breathe increases, while heart rate and perceived effort may change. The athlete's task is not to defeat these signals, but to interpret them correctly within safe limits.

EXPECTED

Urge to breathe
Chest effort
Muscle burning
Fatigue
Need to surface

TAKE SERIOUSLY

Darkening vision
Marked dizziness
Loss of coordination
Unusual chest pain
Confusion

STOP NOW

Fainting
Loss of consciousness
Seizure-like event
Severe breathlessness
New serious symptom

SAFETY RULE

- Breath-hold training must never be done alone.
- Hyperventilation is not a safe performance method.
- Do not interpret the decision to surface as weakness.
- Unusual symptoms require medical assessment.

Mental toughness is not silencing the body's safety limits. It is the ability to make a safe decision even under competitive pressure.

Common mental traps

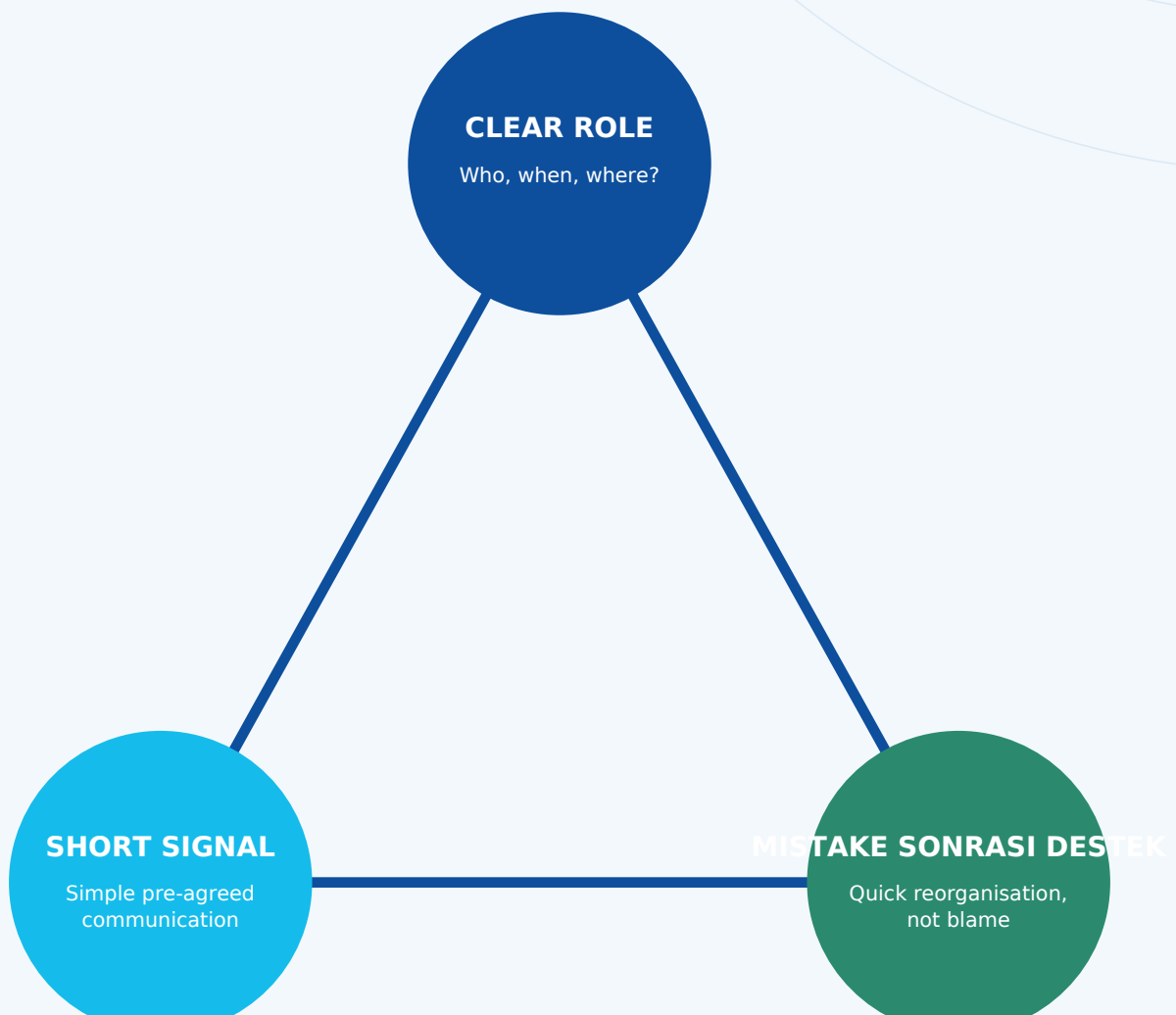
WHAT THE MIND SAYS	A MORE USEFUL RESPONSE
<i>"I must solve every position."</i>	Play your role; the whole team solves the game.
<i>"Breath pressure means I am weak."</i>	It is a body signal; make the safe decision.
<i>"I must make up for the mistake immediately."</i>	Rushed compensation may create another error; reset first.
<i>"The opponent is stronger than me."</i>	Track the next task, not the opponent's strength.
<i>"I must stay calm throughout the match."</i>	The aim is manageable activation, not perfect calm.
<i>"I should not feel fear."</i>	Fear may be present; you can still choose your action.

QUICK REMINDER

A thought does not have to be true. Often it is enough to ask whether it is useful.

Team trust and communication

In Underwater Rugby, trust is not only emotional closeness; it is predictability in play. Knowing that a teammate will perform their role reduces mental load and speeds decisions.



WHAT SHOULD TEAM LANGUAGE SOUND LIKE?

Instead of "Why did not you do it?"

"What are we doing in the next position?"

Instead of "Hold on longer."

"Make your safe ascent on time."

Instead of "You lost the ball."

"Return to the defensive line now."

Returning to the game after a mistake

A mistake and its impact are not the same. Losing the ball lasts a few seconds; the mind can stay stuck on it for several positions. Mental recovery means shortening that impact without denying the mistake.

R

RESET

Create one breath of mental space.

E

LABEL

Say the event, not the judgement: 'The ball was lost.'

S

CHOOSE

Identify the next task.

E

ACT

Return to defence, create a passing lane, perform your role.

T

REVIEW

Make a brief review when the position ends.

"A mistake is not my identity; it is one moment in the game."

Recovery is faster and more useful than self-punishment.

Seven-day practice plan

Mental skills do not develop when remembered only on match day. Five to eight minutes of daily practice can make useful behaviours more automatic during training.

DAY 1

One focus

Choose one mental target during training.

DAY 2

Inner dialogue

Turn three harsh self-statements into useful cues.

DAY 3

RESET

Use the RESET sequence after a small mistake.

DAY 4

Body signals

Observe breathing, muscle tension and changes in attention.

DAY 5

Team language

Give a teammate brief, solution-focused feedback.

DAY 6

Pressure rehearsal

Use one focus under time pressure in training.

DAY 7

Review

What helped, what was difficult and what is the next goal?

NOTE: This practice is designed to build awareness and consistency, not to force performance.

Final thoughts

An Underwater Rugby athlete does not struggle only with opponents beneath the surface. They also face urgency, fear of mistakes, breath pressure and sometimes the thought that they must endure more. Mental toughness is not silencing these voices completely. It is choosing safe, team-focused and useful behaviour while hearing them.

The best athlete is not always the one who looks strongest. It may be the person who reads the game, pulls back when necessary, trusts teammates and reconnects after a mistake without self-punishment. These skills develop over time. A few seconds of accurate orientation during a match can be more valuable than a long motivational speech.

Ask yourself: 'What is the smallest useful action I can control right now?' The answer often shows the way back into the game.

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This guide is for general information only and does not replace individual medical assessment or treatment.