

# THE SCOURGE OF THE WHAT IF'S

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**T**he great children's poet, Shel Sil-

verstein has a terrific poem for athletes. I don't think he wrote it for athletes, but as far as I'm concerned, he might as well have. It's right on the money and his subject is one of the primary causes of choking. It's called

## "THE WHAT IF'S"

*Last night while I lay sleeping  
here, Some what ifs crawled inside my ears*

*And pranced and partied all night long,  
And sang their same old what if song.....  
(what follows is my adaption)*

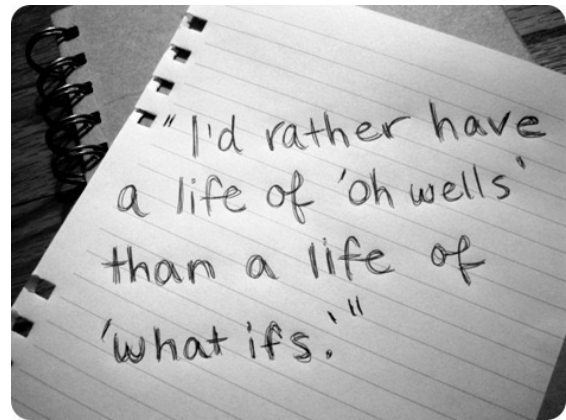
*"What if I choke?" "What if I lose?" "What if I balk?" "What if my racquet is broke?" "What if I double fault and leave my partner stranded?" What if I get hurt and have to play left handed?"*

*"What if I'm cut?" "What if I fall?" "What if I get defaulted?" "What if they're too tall?"*

The best way to make yourself too nervous to perform to your potential is by leaving the NOW and jumping ahead to the FUTURE. The future is the land of the "what if's." When you allow your focus of concentration to get ahead of yourself, you will end up undermining your self confidence and getting much too uptight to play the way you're capable of.

If you spend a moment and think back to some of your worst performances, chances

are really high that they were a direct result of you being in the FUTURE, entertaining the "what if's."



If you'd like to more consistently play to your potential, if you want to make the team, land that starting position on the team or qualify for a big tournament, then you want to get into the habit of keeping your focus of concentration in the NOW, on what is happening moment by moment.

**I**f you want true poetry, that is, poetry in performance, then you need to learn to keep the "what if's" from crawling inside your ears.