

Interview with Dr. Ken Ravizza & Cindra Kamphoff on the High Performance Mindset Podcast

Cindra: Welcome to the High Performance Mindset, the legend Ken Ravizza. Thank you so much for joining me here today, Ken.

Ken Ravizza: Thank you Cindra, for having me.

Cindra: I'm really delighted to talk with today and I know you're going to have so much wisdom to share with people who are listening. Ken, to start us off, can you tell us about your passion and what you do?

Ken Ravizza: What I do in terms of my practice is I work in, I'm an educational sports psychologist. I'm really an educator and basically what I do is provide information, give the person skills to use that information, and support them in refining and developing that information so that they can put it into a system that works for them. And the reason my approach is education is I was a university professor for 40 years at Cal State Fullerton and had the privilege of learning from a lot of students and athletes over the years.

Cindra: Yeah. I love it. So you were a full professor for 40 years, that's amazing. I know you do a lot of work in major league baseball right now. Tell us about how you got started in that area. Why major league baseball? How did you get started in baseball?

Ken Ravizza: Okay. Interesting. At Cal State Fullerton, our baseball program is very strong and going back to 1979 Cindra, God, before you were born.

Cindra: I was born then.

Ken Ravizza: There you go. And I started working with a coach there by the name of Augie Garrido who just ended up his career last year at the University of Texas, being the winningest college baseball coach in the history of the game. And I got started with him at Cal State Fullerton and then in 1984, we won the college world series and a lot of the players were saying how the mental game helped. And at that point, a gentleman with the California Angels by the name of Marcel Lachemann, he was their pitching coach at the time, he contacted me and in 1985, I started working with the Angels. And I worked with them from 1985 to 2000.

And in that time period, Cindra, I worked with the Major League Club, the Minor League Club. There was one point where I was sent to the minors, the manager at the time didn't want me to with the big club. There was a time I was released and then rehired. And that was interesting. Both of those experiences

because I never realized what it was like for a player to be sent down or to be released until I experienced it myself. Then you go through this self-doubt, you go through wondering, "Am I good enough?" And all of those things that they go through. But that was my initial experience in major league baseball. And then I was there I met one of our minor league coaches was a gentleman named Joe Madden.

And Joe, of course, now is the manager of the Cubs and Joe and I started working together in 1985. So we have a long history of being together. And after the Angels, I went to the Dodgers for a couple years, and then I went, when Joe got the job with Tampa, I went over there to Tampa for about four years. And then the travel got too much and I came back to the Angels and then when Joe got the job with the Cubs, I went back over with Joe to the Cubs. So I'm in my 25th year Cindra working in major league baseball.

Cindra: Oh my goodness.

Ken Ravizza: That's a long winded story there.

Cindra: Oh, wow. 25 years. That's amazing. You have so much wisdom I know that you can share with us. One question I have before we dive into that, your first start with the Angels, tell us about how that worked and I'm thinking about perhaps people who are wanting to make some kind of leap like that. How did it work for you going from Cal State Fullerton at the college level to the Angels? How did that happen, specifically?

Ken Ravizza: Well I think one thing I'd recommend to the audience whether their sports practitioners or whether they're coaches, I think the biggest thing I can recommend is enjoy where you're at, learn where you're at, and really immerse yourself in coaching, delivering the sports psych services to that group and do the best you can with it in whatever level you're at. I personally, Cindra, never had the idea that I was going to work with this team to get to this team to get to this team. It never worked that way.

I was just doing what I was doing and I was engaged in it and it just took off from there. I think sometimes we try to figure out how we're going to get there and we spend too much time figuring out how to get there versus really doing the work. So that would be the first thing I would say.

Second thing would be each step along the way, it's critical to learn from those coaches and those athletes that you have the privilege to work with at whatever level, because their experience is so important and for them to share it with you is just incredible. And now with that said, Cindra, to get to your question, I'm finally get to it, getting started. I think one of the things is that there's going to be a certain point whether you go to a high school team, a college team, a pro

team, where you're going to have to give a presentation maybe a 20 minutes, half hour presentation where you've got to basically present your program and those people have to be sitting there and they have to walk out of that meeting going, "This can help us. This is worth our time."

And when you do those presentations, that's why if you're working at the high school level, junior high, get in front of that group. Talk. Because that experience is so important. And for me, being a university professor, one of the things I had to advantage of is I was in front of a classroom all the time. So teaching is sort of my passion, my love. So it just came. I remember my first talk to the Angels, I was brought in, I talked to just the pitchers, this was 1985. They had 30 pitchers in the room. Marcel Lachemann, the gentleman who brought me in said, "Ken, you're going to have 30 minutes to talk to these guys and at the end of the meeting, I'm going to hand them a three by five index card, they're going to write down, 'Yes, we want this man back,' 'No, we've had enough.'" And he said, "You're going to have to deliver."

So I do my talk and that particular spring training day, it was raining in Mayfair, Arizona, so we had to move the tractor equipment out of the back of the clubhouse and we sat out bags of limes in the back row of the clubhouse and I start doing my talk and Cindra, in the middle of my talk, the hot water heater for the showers goes on and there's this roar in the room. And I'm sitting there doing my talk and I just didn't miss a beat. I didn't even hear the roar, Cindra, I was so nervous and anxious about the whole damn thing. I didn't even hear it. I'm just delivering my thing. And after the talk, the number of players that came up and said, "You did not even hear that hot water go off." And I said, "What hot water heater?" And they said, "I can learn something from you."

My point being, the medium is the message. The way you deliver that presentation, the way that you handle any distractions, the players are picking up on that, because they want something that works in the practical world. So that was my initial presentation, Cindra.

Cindra: Oh, I love it. I love your advice and what I really hear you saying is do great work, right? Do great work because what you kind of started with is the importance of enjoying where you're at, doing the best that you can learning from others, but then when you have the opportunity, you got to deliver. And that's what I hear you say is like be a role model for the mental skills and the sport psychology principles. But you got to deliver, you got to make it something that athletes and coaches can use.

Ken Ravizza: Correct. And I think what's very important is just like you help the athlete with his or her performance, you've got to work on your performance and you have to do the preparation. You have to do the work. I just, I found with graduate

students over the years, that they wanted to work with Olympic teams, professional teams, but man, you need to work with that junior high team. You need to work with youth sport teams. You need to talk to a friend who is coaching a Little League team and go in and talk to his team. Those types of experiences are just so important. No question.

Cindra: And that's where you hone your craft, that's where you get really good, right? And to be really good at delivering these services in a group of people, you have to have good delivery skills, story telling, and proven techniques and strategies. And I like what you're saying, we got to continue to work on our craft.

So 25 years in Major League Baseball, Ken. One thing that I heard you kind of talking about is your relationship with Joe Madden and just tell us a little bit about how you think relationships with managers or coaches really, really help sports psychology consultants and what role do you think that plays?

Ken Ravizza: Oh, Cindra, that's a great point you're making, because the relationships with the people you're working with are just so critical and especially where you work with professional football, a lot of work I would imagine, Cindra, that you do is through the coaches. So you help the coaches coach the athletes. And sometimes we're doing that. We're helping the coaches coach the athletes on the mental game and these aspects with them, because the coaches are there every single day. So they're the ones so that if you can build that relationship and work through the coaches so the player is not only hearing it from you but he or she is hearing it from their coach and they're hearing that vocabulary and they're hearing that the mental game is important, that's critical. No question.

Cindra: Absolutely. Coaches are there every day. So tell us Ken, what advice would you give to people who perhaps are just starting or want to work to enhance these relationships? What's worked for you in terms of how to connect with these coaches and managers and how to develop this relationship that you're talking about?

Ken Ravizza: I think the first thing is you've got to spend time, you've got to learn the sport, you've got to show them you understand their sport, you've got to be able to take whatever you do in terms of performance enhancement sport psych, and you've got to customize that so it works for that particular sport. And that's the first thing you need to do. Second thing is if you can get time to just observe and just go in and watch. I know when I have the masters students in our program that came for two years, the first year, all I had them do was go to practices, watch, observe.

Yogi Berra had a phrase and it said, "If you want to see, you have to watch. If you want to see, you have to watch." So that you go there and you just observe

and let that experience show itself to you. Instead of going in, "I got this for you, that for you, that for you." If you get time, see what's going on in that environment and how you can customize your program to meet the needs of that particular team. So spend the time with the observation.

Cindra: So customize for the sport, observe what's going on, two really important strategies or just things that we need to keep in mind. You know Ken you have such an opportunity-

Ken Ravizza: And I think Cindra, in terms of that, I think what's important for the ... and this is where the coach becomes so important. If we can integrate our sport psych skills into task relevant performance cues, so that the athlete can integrate them into their performance. So today, the big buzzword as we know is a lot of stuff on mindfulness. Mindfulness, I'm going to meditate. Great. That's great. But when it comes to performance, how do you integrate the breath into the performance because when you're performing, it isn't necessarily this quiet, gentle breath. Sometimes you need some intensity, you need some aggressiveness, you need some passion.

And the key becomes how you take those skills and integrate them into task relevant performance cues and this is where the coach can be so helpful with us, to be a guide, to show us how to do that.

Cindra: Sure. So can you give us maybe a little more information, Ken, on how you might actually do that? How would you teach the breathing to let's say an athlete and then how would you help that person make sure that they're incorporating in task relevant cues, working with the coach in the way that you're describing?

Ken Ravizza: Okay. Let's say, so here we go. Let's take the mindfulness issue of the breathing and you work the breath, okay? And you do your meditation and you're working your breath. So now you're in the game and I remember when I was with the Angels, Mike Trout was a rookie and he had come up and I worked with Mike for two years. When I left the Angels, the last thing I said to Mike, or when Mike and I talked, I said, "Mike, from the two years we spent together, what did you get out of our work together?" And he looked at me and he said, "Ken, I got two things. One is walk slow from the on deck circle to the batter's box." Okay. "It begins before it begins. The way you walk into the box, the way the swimmer walks to the starting blocks, the way the track and field athlete goes to their starting blocks. It begins before it begins."

The second thing Mike said was, "I learned that I have to finish my breath because sometimes what I do is I rush the breath. And if I rush the breath, then what's going to happen is I'm going to pull out with my front side, I'm going to open up with my shoulder. But if I can finish the breath, at least I'm in control of

myself to that point." So now we're taking that breathing from the meditation and we're bringing it in to a task relevant performance cue.

In football, Cindra, it could be the quarterback, if there's a time where they're coming out of a huddle that they just take a breath as they come up to the line of scrimmage or after he sees the formation, makes the call, he takes a breath to just gather himself, get himself in control. And that's where we have to integrate it into task cues.

Cindra: Sure. You bet. Well and I like what you're saying in terms of it begins before it begins, right? That's really sticky. Ken, can you tell us-

Ken Ravizza: I'm sorry.

Cindra: Oh, I just said, "It's really sticky." Can you tell us how you might teach breathing? Meaning, let's just saying is there a particular way you teach it or do you let the athlete kind of figure out what's going to work best for them?

Ken Ravizza: Well, I'll tell you first off, I think the breathing is, in my career, I've been involved in eight Olympic games, five summer Olympics and three winter Olympics. And I would say the last four Olympic games, talking with the athletes that I worked with, asking them afterwards, "What helped you the most?" The overwhelming reaction from the athletes response was, "Breathing." Okay?

And at first, Cindra, I was sort of offending. With all the stuff I had to listen to, that the came back and said breathing was the most effective thing. But that's the way it goes. But let's look at the breath. What does the breath do? Number one, the breath brings oxygen to the brain so that you can think clearly. Number two, the breath when you need energy, focus on the inhalation. When you need to calm down, focus on the exhalation. So there's two phases of the breathing, the inhalation when you need energy, the exhalation when you need to calm down.

The breath brings you to the present moment. Inhale, exhale, it gets you back here. The breath allows you to shift from thinking to doing, to make that shift from the thinking mind to the athletic mind, the doing mind. And the final thing with the breath is the breath is the start of good rhythm. Good rhythm begins with good breath. So any sport where you get a chance where it starts and stops, if you can catch a breath in there, it helps you reset and get started again. How do I teach the breathing? Generally, after I take the people through realization, then we do the abdominal breath. And we may do it for like two minutes.

Now from teaching stress management at the university, we know that if you're really going to get the physiological effects out of meditation, you have to go at least 20 minutes. But hey, at least two minutes is a start and at least they're doing something to get into this approach.

Cindra: Yeah. Absolutely. Really good evidence on why breathing is important. Ken do you think that the breath, would you say that's the centerpiece of kind of what you do? Or what would you say that the center of sort of your philosophy on performance and what works for athletes?

Ken Ravizza: I think the centerpiece for me comes from my sport philosophy background. And what do I mean by that? I taught courses in philosophy of sport and one of the sections that we spent a lot of time with and any athlete that I work with, I start with, "Why do you play your sport? Why do you do this? Why do you love competing? What is it about it? Why? Why do you do it?" Because when you know why you're doing something, it helps you shovel the garbage that goes with the pursuit of excellence because one thing that's really clear, high-level performance in whatever it is is a love-hate relationship with what you do.

You love it at times and you hate it at times. There's no question about it. And when you know why you're doing it, it helps you deal with the negative parts of the performance. So the first thing for me is a philosophical thing: why? Second thing is the athlete has to take responsibility and be accountable for his or her actions. If they're not going to be responsible and accountable for their actions, you might as well stop because they're not going to be able to do anything. So responsibility and accountability is critical. And we talk about that. Before we do any of the realization or any of the breathing or any of the focusing stuff, we got to get some of these things really laid out and get them to buy into why the mental game is important in this puzzle.

And then for me, once we get that in place and my baseball book that I wrote with Tom Hansen and we just finished it, we talk about this as RAMPC. And RAMPC, the R stands for responsibility, okay? You got to be responsible and accountable like I said. The A stands for awareness. You have to develop your awareness of what's going on because athletic performance is like driving a car. You come to a signal light, if the light is green you go. If the light is yellow, you need to attend to the intersection, check your rear view mirror for a police officer and then make your call. If the light is red, you got to stop.

What do most of us do with yellow lights, Cindra? We speed up. What do most of us do in athletic performance when the garbage hits the fan? We try harder. We speed up. So the awareness part of the puzzle is a very important part. So we got R for responsibility, A for awareness, M mission. Why do you play your game? What are you trying to do? P, preparation. It begins before it begins. What are those routines that you use to channel in your energy and get

yourself where you need to be? And the final point is RAMPC, the C stands for compete. And this is a big change, Cindra, in my years of doing this, that I would say the last five years what I'm hearing from the college coaches and high school coaches is the kids do not know how to compete. They know how to showcase, how to get the scholarship, how to show their talent, but they haven't spent the time competing. And learning to compete is a skill.

And as crazy as it sounds, we have to teach them how to compete. And for me and Tom what we came up with in our book was competing basically equals giving 100 percent of what you've got to win the next pitch in baseball and softball. In basketball, it may be the next possession. In football, it may be the next play, based on the sport. But you're going to give 100 percent of what you've got and that's what competing it all about. So those are some of the techniques that we get into and I get into in my work, Cindra.

Cindra: Excellent, Ken. There's so many ways that I could go from there. Two follow up questions I have for sure is how do you think that we teach athletes to compete? We can tell them it's about giving 100 percent of what you've got right now on this play, what are the ways that you think that we can really teach athletes this? Because this is something I've heard, as well, in terms of at the high school or college level that maybe another way to explain it is the athletes aren't as gritty or they don't stick with things as long as they possibly can or as long as they used to.

Ken Ravizza: Right. Well a couple of things leading into competition. One thing I've learned in my years of doing this with professional athletes and Olympic athletes, confidence is fragile. Let's be real clear on that. Now I know for the listeners, they think these top level athletes have everything all together. Believe me. They're human beings like you and I, Cindra. They have their flaws and their frailties. You don't see that on TV but we all have it. Confidence is fragile. To learn to compete, you've got to learn to compete when you have your A game, when everything is going great, that's fantastic. But you also got to learn to compete when you got your B game and your C game.

And one thing I ask athletes all the time is I ask them this question, "Are you that crappy an athlete that you have to feel good to perform well?" Because from my perspective, feeling good is overrated. You don't have to feel good to perform well. With baseball players, if you ask them when they were a kid and they played whiffle ball with their friends, how many times did their friends come to the house, knock at the door, and say, "Do you want to play?" Never once do you ask yourself, "How do I feel today? Where's my swing at? I don't know." No you went out and you played. You competed. And it didn't matter what you had. You made the most of what you got. And that's what's so important. And how do you teach that? The way you teach that is I think encouraging kids to compete more in different sports. I mean the one thing the

research is showing us is this specialization may not be as great as we once thought it was and that the athletes need to participate in a variety of sports and get those different competitive experiences. So that would be one area where they could do it.

Another area is in the way they do their practice and training. And this is one thing, Cindra, I don't know about your work but in my work, when I first started, so much of my energy was getting college teams for nationals, big meets, big competition, big games. And within five years doing the work, my energy shifted to today's practice, today's training. And talking about today's practice, today's training, that's where you do the work, that's where you do the competing. That's where you give 100 percent of what you got to take care of the next drill, the next thing you're trying to do.

So it's got to be done in practice and training. Boy, Cindra, you ask me a question and I blah, blah, blah. Am I talking too much?

Cindra: No way. It's amazing. I feel like you're giving us so much wisdom. I appreciate everything that you're giving us. But absolutely no, I love it.

Ken Ravizza: And with the wisdom, with the wisdom, Cindra, one thing I want to say about that is the stuff I'm sharing has come from the coaches and athletes that I had the privilege to work with and learn from. And I have learned so much more from my failures and the mistakes that I've made and when you do the work and when you're coaching, you're going to make mistakes, things are going to happen. But you've got to spend some time reflecting on it and learning from that experience. And this is what goes on when you talk about how do we teach competition? Well one way we teach competition is we have the competitive experience but then it's not only having the experience but it's processing, reflecting on, and talking about what the heck we learned out there.

For the coaches in the group, after your games, do you spend some time just debriefing and getting the lessons learned from what happened? In my last 10 years of teaching at Cal State Fullerton, Cindra, I had students that graduated from the US Military Academy at West Point. They served in Iraq of Afghanistan where they were in charge of 140 to 150 soldiers and after their tour of duty, they came to Fullerton where they did a Masters with me in sports psych. From our program, they went back to West Point where they worked in the performance center at West Point, where they work on the mental skills as they related to academics, sport, and military. And one of the things I learned from those four gentlemen and one woman that I had the privilege of working with was the after action review. When they went out on a mission, after the mission was over, they sat down and got the lessons learned. And even just as a performer or for the coaches in the audience, if you just ask these two

questions. "What went well and what do we have to get better at?" And that will start triggering stuff.

So that then we can learn, we had this game, we went out and competed. Great. But what did we learn from it so we can be better for the next time? So this act of reflection and thinking about it is a very important skill for athletes to embrace.

Cindra: Yeah and I would guess really important for coaches and also consultants like us. There are times it doesn't always go perfectly for us either. Ken, I have two questions about failure. What do you think that the ... When you watch the best of the best, right? So we could talk about Major League Baseball here. When you see the best perform, how do you think that they respond to failure? How do they approach it and how do they respond to it?

Ken Ravizza: I think they get upset. I think they get frustrated. They get, I mean one thing I've learned is when you don't perform to your capabilities, you feel terrible, okay? I talked with teams, losing sucks. But if the opponent beat you, you can sleep at night. If you beat yourself, then you stare at the ceiling all night. So there's the point where getting back to that responsibility, accountability. Did I do all the things I could do to perform to my capabilities? And if I did, hey, I can feel good about the performance.

Now right after the performance, I may be upset. But in reflection, I can get the information learned from the performance so that I can get better, okay? And also, Cindra, this is one of the things we hear all the time about focusing on success. Well, I'll tell you, fear of failure is a heck of a motivator. I mean, I see a lot of high level athletes. They do not want to fail. So what does that mean? That means they're going to do the work, they're going to do the physical preparation. They're going to do the mental preparation. They're going to take care of their bodies. They're going to eat properly. They're going to do everything so they don't fail. And that can be a heck of a motivator because failing hurts.

And when it stops hurting, then it's time for you to leave your game.

Cindra: Sure, when-

Ken Ravizza: So that's one of the things I see with the high level athletes.

Cindra: Wow. That's really good. Ken can you tell us about a time you failed? As we're listening, we might think, "Oh my gosh, 25 years in Major League Baseball. Your book Heads of Baseball is a legend." But I know there are times that didn't go perfectly for you. Tell us a story about a time that you failed and what we can learn from it.

Ken Ravizza: I think what you're saying here is critical and you brought it up earlier. For the sport psych people listening to this, we are performers and there's time we do fail. And we have to get the lessons learned out of our failures. And what happens in that situation I think of a time, failure, woo. Three years into my career and I'm teaching at Cal State Fullerton. I'm working with the teams and the UCLA athletic department invites me to come up and give a presentation to their coaches. They have one meeting a year where they have a banquet and then they have speakers, they have a speaker talk to their coaches. So I was selected to be the speaker and I'm sitting there, we're in this restaurant, and I'm getting ready to do my talk, and who walks into the back of the room, John Wooden, the great UCLA basketball coach.

He had retired but he came to hear the speaker. I was the speaker. And John Wooden is going to be listening to me. Here's one of the greatest college coaches of all time and I've got to talk. So I start doing my talk [inaudible 00:36:16] stress management in sport, I think was the theme. And all of a sudden, I noticed that my armpits are getting a little wet. And then I start noticing sweat building up on my forehead. And the next thing I know is I have this bead of sweat dripping down my face, come down to my nose, and dropping on my notes in front of me. And basically I'm doing this presentation on stress management for athletics and I'm basically starting to freak out in the midst of the presentation.

So that didn't go to well, Cindra, to say the least. But what I learned from that that was very important is I had gone into this presentation thinking, "I'm going to go in there. I'm going to give a startling presentation. All the coaches are going to like it. They're going to want me to start working with their teams. This is going to be the beginning of my career." That was a heck of a lot of pressure to put on myself. Instead of going in and just talking about what I do. So that's what I learned from that one, Cindra. So that was a disaster but in the long haul, very positive experience but frightening at the time no question.

Cindra: One thing that I'm hearing in that situation is that you were just future based. You were thinking about what was going to happen after your presentation instead of just being there with them.

Ken Ravizza: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Cindra: And being there for them, you were really maybe perhaps there for yourself which you're right, doesn't always help us.

Ken Ravizza: Yep. Yep. You got it on that one. No question.

Cindra: So Ken, you've talked about a lot of, man, so much value already. Besides the RAMPC which you talked about, the breathing which we talked about, the why, is there a signature technique that perhaps you use that is Ken Ravizza, could you share with us one of those? I know you have multiple.

Ken Ravizza: I think the biggest, I think two techniques that I'd say, one we've already talked about and that's the breathing, which I've been doing for ages with athletes and the other is making sure with their performance that they spend time when they got to a new venue, new place where they're performing, that they spend the time familiarizing themselves with the environment and then one of the things, this idea that it begins before it begins, that you get comfortable as you can be in that environment and in the venue, you pick out a focal point. Something, a flag, it could be sign on the wall, when you look at that thing, it reminds you to pull your chest up, it reminds you that you've worked hard, that you've paid the dues, that you belong here. And that technique of a focal point has been huge.

So many athletes shared with me how much that helped in their moments of insecurity in performance and being able to get themselves back. And also, Cindra, what it serves to do, by having something external that you're focused on, it gets your attention out of your head where all of the fear and self doubt is and gets you out, gets you on an external thing, because competition is external. You have to focus on your opponent, the ball, the target, whatever the thing may be. And you've got to lock into that. So you can't be too internal with your focus and concentration.

Cindra: Yeah. That's good.

Ken Ravizza: So those would be two of the techniques that have been real helpful for me.

Cindra: Awesome. Awesome. Awesome. One of the things that you mentioned earlier was just that we might think these lead athletes are like these super humans, they never experience self doubt, you talked about how confidence is fragile. And just now you talked about even these high level athletes need a focus cue to remind themselves that they belong here. What insights can you share with us just in terms of that they are human, what am I really trying to get at is that they are just like all of us, right? So maybe you can share with us a story or maybe an example or your insights at this level, what do you see?

Ken Ravizza: I think one of the things, Cindra, and you're really hitting it. We tend to think that at that level, these people have it all together. And we all have our frailties. I just want to emphasize that, that whatever level you're working at, whatever level you're coaching at, whatever you can do, I mean, the top level really isn't that different. In some ways, they are. But very often the only difference they have is they have a special talent, okay? But emotionally, they go through many of the same things. Especially as a professional athlete gets

older and he or she doesn't have the physical skills that they once had, you don't think they notice that? They notice it.

And they have to get their mental game together if they're not already using it to make the most of what skills they do have left and that's what a lot of our young practitioners are doing with the teams they're working with is making the case on why the mental game is important at all levels of performance. One thing I would recommend, Cindra, to your listeners is we did this thing and it's also eight years ago where ESPN did a thing called E60 and you can get it on the internet. Just punch Evan Longoria, the third baseman for the Tampa Bay Rays. Evan Longoria, E60. And it's a 10 minute clip of him talking about the mental game and how he got into it in college at Long Beach State where we worked together and he talks about how a young athlete he worked with it and now as a professional athlete, how he's working with it, and I'll tell you, I just saw Evan about a month ago and he's still working it.

And it's just a beautiful thing and it's a nice too for coaches to show athletes or sports psych people to get the buy in that the mental game is important.

Cindra: Yeah. One thing I heard you just say is that even Evan is still working it, right? Like the mental game isn't something that you maybe work on for a year and then you don't. Right? It's a constant process.

Ken Ravizza: Absolutely. It's just like life. We've got to be working on ourselves and getting better at what we do and it's not like ... Once you think you have it, you're in trouble. It's constant evolution. It's a constant learning that you're going through and this is one the things we really emphasize in the New Heads of Baseball Two book is the ongoing journey and how there's constant fluctuations that occur with the mental game, because the mental game can be so simple but at the same time, it can be complex. And in one of our discussions, the gentleman I wrote the book with, Tom Hansen, he said, "So really, Ken, what we're talking about is simplicity." And I said, "That's it. It's simplicity. It's simple but it's complex."

And I think one of the issues we have in sports psych and coaching today is we simplify everything but there's a point where you can make it too simple and that becomes a problem. No question.

Cindra: For sure. For sure. How do you see that play out in real life where maybe we simplify it too much?

Ken Ravizza: I think where, hey, if I just believe I can achieve anything I want. If I just have the image of it, if I just believe, if I believe I can achieve. Well, I'm sorry, it takes a heck of a lot work and it takes a lot of blood, sweat, and tears. And the belief is one part of the puzzle but you better do the work that goes with it and

the preparation and you better be ready to deal with the adversity. It's not that simple. And I think this is one of the issues we get into today is we make it sound so simple. If you believe you can achieve. It's complex. It's not that simple. And it's hard for young people to understand that but that's what it takes.

Cindra: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative). You know, Ken, I put a tweet out today that I was going to be interviewing you and got several responses. So I'm going to ask you a few questions that people posed on Twitter. And one-

Ken Ravizza: Okay.

Cindra: Okay. We think they're really good questions and I can't ask you all of them but I picked a few here. So one question is, "What do you think about, it seems like in Major League Baseball, there's more of an openness to hiring a sports psychology or mental training staff compared to other pro sports, what do you think that's about and do you also see that?"

Ken Ravizza: So that's baseball's having more is what you're saying?

Cindra: Yeah.

Ken Ravizza: Yeah.

Cindra: Yep.

Ken Ravizza: And that is actually. I think the first wave of sports psych was with Olympic athletes and this goes back to the 1960s when the Soviet Union and East Germany had the power houses and they were doing a lot of work in sports psych. And the US caught on and then it hit the zenith in the 1980s, [inaudible 00:47:21] games in LA. Most of the teams, US Olympic teams, had sports psych people working with them. Now from there, at that time, 1985 when I started with the Angels there was Arty Dorfan with the Oakland A's, I was with the Angels, there was a gentleman Charlie Maher who was with the Indians. There were three of us.

And that has much room today where I believe 28 of the 30 teams have sports psych people working with them and most of the changes happened in just the last five years. And the reason for that is because in baseball, they did the strength and conditioning. Everyone got into that. Then they did the analytics and no everyone's into analytics. And it's almost like right now the next new thing is the whole mental game thing and a lot of teams have jumped on board with that. So that's why baseball has really taken off with it. Now football has some and I'm hearing more and more in the football world, the NFL, and the

NBA, more of the teams are getting involved. So I think it's just part of performance, that people are finally getting it, Cindra.

But what's key is for the young practitioners, you've got to learn your craft so that you can do the work so when your opportunity comes, you can really deliver the program you want to deliver.

Cindra: Absolutely. Absolutely. All right. Next question. If you were going to write a letter to your younger self, let's say maybe when you just started out or maybe 20 years ago, what would you say in that letter?

Ken Ravizza: That's great. That's a great question. Whoever came up with that, that's a wonderful question. What would I do differently? One, I don't think I'd do much different, because what I said earlier was when I was doing the work, I was always doing the work where I was at and then one thing led to the next. So that was very, very helpful to just be patient.

What would I tell myself to do differently? In the baseball world, I would say learn Spanish. I wish I had done that. I tried on a couple of occasions, couldn't pull that off. That would be one thing if you're going to into that sport where so many of the athletes speak that language, that would be important. Another thing, I did a lot of work on myself, there's not a technique I use with athletes and coaches that I haven't used on myself and what I would do differently is probably do even more self work on figuring out my stuff. That I think I would do more of. I did some of it but you never can do enough of that. So those are a couple things, Cindra I would say.

Cindra: Excellent. Really, really good. What about this question? What are some of the key or desirable attributes of a sports psychology consultant who is just starting out and trying to get their foot in the door? So what do you think really the desired attributes of a consultant are, doing this type of work that you and I are doing?

Ken Ravizza: Okay. Great question. I talked about that a lot with my graduate students over the years. I think one, what are some of the attributes? I think the desire and willingness to learn is huge. And that plays itself out with going and observing and watching and spending the time. You're not going to learn this quick. I remember I would have graduate students and I would always say, "I'm doing a talk, you can come and sit in." And they'd sit in the back of the room and they'd watch. And there would be some, man, I could talk about anything, they would be there, they would watch. It would be the same talk the heard 100 times, they would be there, because every time they heard it, they were picking up something different.

Sometimes when they were watching me talk, they would watch me, they would watch the audience, they would reflect back. Other times, they were just listening to content. Now, there were also students that said, "Well, I heard that talk." Well, they didn't get it. So this idea of going out and doing the observation and really learning to perceive things and take them in. Second, work on yourself. Like I just mentioned, you don't do any technique with anyone that you haven't used on yourself and I would also encourage, use it on some close friends, experiment with it. Try it. That would be another thing I'd bring into it.

Third thing, learn the literature. Read in the area of sports psych, read books, read journals, because part of our job is taking research data, some of it, and applying it and putting into a language that coaches and athletes can understand. And I'm going to sit here, Cindra and say, "Everything has to be totally research based." But you do have understand some of the basic concepts that go into it. Just because you played sport isn't necessarily a reason why you're ready to do sports psychology, that's for darn sure.

What other qualities? I think being creative is very important, that you're able to deliver your program in a way that keeps people engaged in what you're doing. I think that is huge. And the creativity that it takes to do that and that's what's exciting in this day and age, how we get the athletes to buy into what we're talking about. So those would be a couple things that I would throw out.

Cindra: Oh, good Ken. You know I wanted to ask you a question about your creativity because one of the things that I see that's unique about you compared to perhaps other people in the field is that you're able to present these ideas in really sticky ways, like RAMPC, you know? Like this acronym or this phrase you came up with. Can you talk about how that's developed over time and how you still work to stay creative?

Ken Ravizza: I think a lot of that developed for me from the teaching in the university environment, that being in that university environment, you had to be creative in your classes to keep the students engaged. So that was definitely a part of it. And for me it was also a matter of bringing it to life. You can talk about releasing things but then one of my things was, I would have this small plastic toilet that had a flushing sound. And people, it was just, it became a symbol. This toilet became the symbol of letting stuff go, of flushing things, of moving onto the next thing. So that the symbols really represent things to the athlete and just the symbol can become an important teaching tool.

One of the techniques I've used over the years, Cindra, is when an athlete's feeling a lot of pressure, I will actually get up sometimes and just lean on their back and be the pressure and just have them walk around with me, dragging me around a little bit. Now you got to be careful when you say that, that you're

not doing it with a young ... let go of this, how do you let go? You got to get me off your back, how do you release? What do you do? Yeah. Important.

Cindra: Excellent.

Ken Ravizza: I think another story on that, Cindra, early in my career I started in gymnastics and I remember we had one meet where we had a great meet going on and then all of a sudden, it was a women's team, we went into beam and we did a terrible job and then we carried the beam to the uneven bars and the uneven bars were terrible. The pace was totally frustrated. So that was on a Friday night and then Monday when we practiced at the gym, I had the men's team, they got there early, the men's team was there, I had them take the balance beam and put it right in front of the uneven bars.

And that's an unusual site to have the beam in front of the uneven bars for women. So the coach came in, talked about the beam, and he said, "We're going to start off, put on your grips, we're going to go to uneven bars." We get over to uneven bars and the girls go, "We can't do uneven bars, the beam is in the way." And the coach said, "What did we do Friday night? Did we carry the beam over the uneven bars?" And the girls went, "That's exactly what we did. We can't do that again." So it's one thing to tell them you can't do it and it's another thing to see it, feel it, experience it, and that is huge.

Cindra: Excellent, Ken. All right... one last question from Twitter.

Cindra: Ken, one last question from the Twitter feed and then we'll wrap up. I know you and I could talk all day, but the last question I have on Twitter is this is what someone said. They said, "I heard Ken Ravizza speak in the nineties. It was life changing for me as a coach," and so he wanted me to ask you about filling a bathtub with water to test one's perfection. Can you tell us about that one?

Ken Ravizza: Yeah. That's a good one. That's another example of perfectionism and what I developed was what we called the Ken Ravizza bathtub test for perfection and that means basically, fill a bathtub up with an inch of water and you have the athlete stand on the surface of the water. If they're able to stand on the surface of the water, they're expected to be perfect. But if they fall through and touch porcelain, they're a human being and I haven't had too many people that can walk on water. So let's let go of the perfectionism. You can also do it with swimming pools.

Cindra: Yeah. It doesn't work, right? People can't walk on water.

Ken Ravizza: Doesn't work.

Cindra: Yeah.

Ken Ravizza: Yeah. But once again, once again, Cindra, the issue is it gives you a chance to just laugh at it a little bit and just chuckle and take the serious thing out of it and just go, "Yeah. That's right. I do do that." Because the first thing is the athlete has to understand it and learn it. The next thing is they have to do it and then the final thing is they have to own it. And owning it is where you customize it into a system that works for you.

Cindra: Ah, excellence. So three steps. Understand it. Do it is the second step. And then own it. Oh, Ken, man you have given us so much value today. I think everything that came out of your mouth could be a tweet. It's so much value. I know you have-

Ken Ravizza: Thank you.

Cindra: Of course. I thank you so much for being on the podcast. I know you have a classic book Heads Up Baseball that everyone should pick up. You have a new book coming out that's going to be launched in September Heads Of Baseball Two. Tell us how we can get on your mailing list so we can learn about this launch. Tel us a little bit ore about that.

Ken Ravizza: We'll be sending more out but I know I'll be contacting you to send out to your people. But they can go to headsofbaseballtwo.com and they can sign up there for, we're trying to get the emails so we can send out information on the launch which is going to come September 17th, around then. And people could get the new book at that point and then we're really excited about it. Tom and I spent the last, we thought we were going to bang it out in a year and it ended up taking three years. But we really feel good about it and I think it's really a nice extension of our first book.

Cindra: Absolutely. I have a preview copy here and it's absolutely amazing. So everyone needs to head over to headsupbaseball2.com, get on the mailing list so you know when it's launched, September 17th. Ken, is there anything else you can tell us about, anything else about the book before we wrap up?

Ken Ravizza: About the book?

Cindra: Yeah.

Ken Ravizza: It's for basically coaches and for athletes and it's very comprehensive. It has a lot of quotes by athletes, every athlete in the book, well, pretty much every athlete. I'd say 90 percent of them are athletes that I actually worked with and they're talking about the mental game and what the go through with it. So that's one of the things that I think the book really brings is current athletes talking about how simple the mental game is and also, Cindra, how complex it can be

and to hear it from these folks is very interesting. The other thing we're excited with is when we wrote the first book, we got a lot of feedback from parents, how the book helped their son, their daughter in life. Not just in baseball or softball. And in this book, we put a chapter in on how the mental skills come into place not only in sport but in life in general. And that's just something in my years of doing this, I can't tell you, Cindra, the number of students, Fullerton athletes I had that came back and said to me, "You know, Ken, the stuff we did 20 years when I was at Fullerton was great but I'll tell you I'm using you more in my life today than I ever did as an athlete."

And to me, that's really what it's about, Cindra, because these are life skills we're talking about.

Cindra: For sure. For sure. So you can pick up Heads Of Baseball. I know it's on Amazon. I have a copy right here. What else were you going to say, Ken?

Ken Ravizza: Well, at this point, Cindra, it's not on Amazon. They're going to have to go to the website headsupofbaseball2.com. And then they can put in their information there and that's the best way to progress at this point but September 17th that's when the launch will be taking place.

Cindra: Excellent. And they can pick up your first book Heads of Baseball on Amazon, right?

Ken Ravizza: Correct. Correct.

Cindra: Excellent. Excellent. Perfect. Well, Ken, first of all I want to thank you so much for being on the podcast, for sharing so much amazing value and being open to sharing your wisdom with us. I know that you impacted thousands of people just by engaging in this interview and I want to share with you a few things that I absolutely loved that you shared. So I liked that you said, your advice for people doing this work is being engaged in what you're doing right now. That so many times we could wish we were working with this team or doing this work, but being where your feet are is very important. You talked about how confidence is fragile and how that even the best of the best sometimes struggle with the confidence. You talked about breathing and how actually you teach the breath and why it's important. Then you talked about RAMPC, responsibility, awareness, your mission, preparation, and you talked about competing and how we can help our athletes compete. And we talked about failure and how the best really take these lessons from times that they failed.

And then how the mental game is simple and complex all at the same time. So Ken I just want to thank you so much for your willingness to share so openly everything that's going through your head and thank you so much your time and your energy and your amazing impact on this field.

- Ken Ravizza: Well, Cindra, that was a heck of a summary. You did a nice job pulling all that together. Good for you and hopefully you'll have me on again on some point and it was fun talking to you about the mental game.
- Cindra: Absolutely. So everyone can over to headsofbaseballtwo.com. Thank you so much Ken, I appreciate your time.
- Ken Ravizza: Okay, Cindra. Take care.

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