Keith Wood. The Raging Potato
Mental Preparation For various Games

Before any sport, mental preparation is very important. It can be the difference between a bad, average or good performance from the player concerned.

I have chosen Keith Wood for his experience, discipline and the fact that he is a legend.

In rugby especially, mental preparation is just as important as a warm up. It can raise your respiration rate, heartbeats per minuet and put you in the correct state of mind for the game ahead.

How much or how intense the preparation is depends on several things:

- Your Opponents: You may need more/less mental preparation depending on your opponents. E.g. against churchers this year, we had to prepare for the biggest and hardest game of our lives. They are a very good, big team, and last time we played them they beat us 46-0. This will be explained with more bullet points.
- Level of competition: The Game against churchers was in the Daily Mail (national) cup and had we won, we would be in the top 62 schools left in the country. This motivated most of us, however, the pressure of this big event showed in some players.
- Environment: The game was played on our own school pitches, in the middle of a big open field. This implies that the game does not mean a lot, and there is not a lot at stake. If the game had been played in a big stadium and there were floodlights, terraces, big screens ect then there would have been more pressure and therefore the big stage would have made us prepare for the game even further
- Crowd: The crowd watching you can be a big part of your mental preparation. If you have an away fixture, then the taunts from the home fans can put you off your game, therefore you must be able to block out those taunts by mentally preparing yourself for it.
- Significant others: If there is some one/people you must impress in the game, say your dad, who has never seen you play before, or a girlfriend, who you want to impress, or even a scout. This can put enormous pressure on the player and this nervous energy can be used to promote performance or destroy

performance. Last Wednesday, against the weald. Mr Turner took us to the game. It was important for everyone to play well as next year he will be our coach. I, like others in our team used this opportunity to impress him; Mr Baldwin said that many of us impressed our future coach.

This is due to mental preparation. Personally, I used methods to psych myself up slightly more than usual, my attitude before the game was important. I believed in my strength, my ability and myself. I used unfair play and decisions to motivate and promote a performance.

Mental Preparation, no matter how good a player is, is essential for a good performance. Keith Wood, in the recent world cup, used special methods of mental preparation to promote a performance from his team. Against Australia, Ireland had 60,000 People taunting them, laughing at every error and even threatening them. Keith told his Players to use these three things to turn into rage, aggression and most importantly, performance. The game finished at 17-16 to Australia, with David Humphreys missing a drop-goal in the dieing seconds of the game.

Ireland put on a memorable performance, which ended Keith's career on a high. Going back to the five bullet points;

The level of competition was extremely high, the highest there is, the world cup
Their opponents were the world no 1's
The environment was a stadium of 75,000 people, an incredible amount of people to watch every mistake, drop, missed tackle, knock on and much more.
The crowd consisted of just 15,000 Ireland fans, and 60,000 Australia fans.
Significant others consisted of Lions Selectors, wives, children and people alike.

Mental rehearsal is where you do a certain action, for good luck or just because it's comfortable. Johnny Wilkinson is a good example, as he has a distinct style of kicking his conversions and penalties. He draws a line from the posts down to the ball and imagines the ball flying along that line through the posts. He also has many other rehearsals, this is just one of them.

When I go out to play rugby, I say to myself “don’t cross the white line onto the pitch until I’m ready to play my heart out”. This puts my mind into a ruthless winning mode.
It is important to be in the correct frame of mind but it is as important if not more important to keep your DICIPLINE. Especially in rugby it is easy to go over the top, get carried away and throw a punch or stamp ect. This will get you yellow carded and you will have lost an opportunity to represent, impress and play.