

an athlete's guide to mindfulness *a quick primer*



There are several factors involved in being a successful athlete. Athletes must train their bodies to be able to perform at a peak level. This typically involves forms of cardio, resistance and agility training, to name a few. Athletes also need to train for their specific sport. Practicing sport-specific individual skills and team concepts accounts for much of practice time. Athletes study film off the field in order to learn more about movement patterns, opponent tendencies, etc.

I can't think of an athlete or coach who wouldn't say that the mental part of competing is also critically important. Yet, when asked, few of those athletes or coaches would say that they spend much or even any time on mental training. They recognize its importance, yet they don't incorporate mental training into their regimen.

This is an interesting paradox, especially considering that so many of the greatest athletes, coaches and teams cite their mental approach as a critical - perhaps the most critical - reason for their success. Anyone can benefit from working on good mental habits. Athletes tend to have success here since they understand the direct relationship between practice and improvement. And what's learned on the field, translates off the field 100%.



Most athletes and coaches are familiar with what it means to be “in the zone.” When athletes are in the zone, they are completely focused on playing the game, their bodies react without thinking, and they perform at their best seemingly effortlessly. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, author of “Finding Flow”, points out that it’s when we are doing an activity we love, and operating at the upper edge of (but not lower or greater than) our ability level, it’s then that we can access the flow state.

From a coaching perspective, being mindful means creating better connections with your players, and fostering a positive, selfless and mentally resilient team culture.

Coaches can “win better” by seeing their sport as a means to develop all the necessary personal skills and qualities needed for players to lead successful, meaningful, happy lives. It is much more likely that a team will perform optimally by including mental training in a systematic way. Lastly, as a coach, you will be able to more fully leverage your responsibility by using your sport to build better people.

Sport provides a perfect platform for developing mindfulness as it is a regular, intentional and physically challenging activity, usually performed in groups. Indeed, athletes can use their sports experience as a way to develop and deepen a mindfulness practice that can greatly enhance their lives. Further, because athletes understand the relationship between regular practice and improvement, they are more likely to do the work required to develop their mindfulness.



For an athlete, a mindfulness practice in conjunction with a sport is an ideal combination for many reasons:

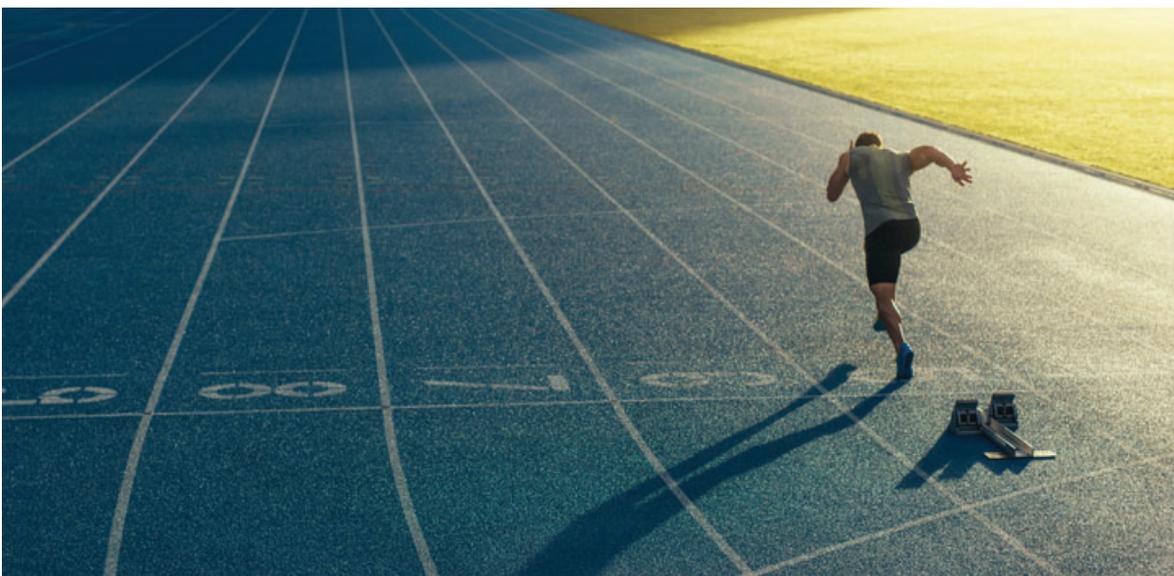
- Improved performance
- Ability to notice and move through negative self talk
- Less anxiety, less focused on outcomes
- Increased ability to stay in the process during games or training sessions
- Greater sense of gratitude and appreciation
- Deeper connections with coaches and teammates
- Enhanced ability to access the flow state
- Better outcomes off the field
- Improved performance in school - all lessons on field apply off field
- Increased resilience - better at handling setbacks and staying positive

So, where do I begin?

Whether on the playing field, training at the gym, or performing in school or at work, we experience our lives through our minds. It makes sense then, that we train our brains. How, do you ask, do we do that?

Our minds are very powerful. On one hand, our minds helps us to solve complicated problems, read and understand directions, and find creative solutions. On the other hand, our minds are like thought factories - they constantly generate random thoughts, words and images. (If you doubt this, try to go 20 seconds without having a thought.) Most people simply identify with those thoughts and frequently, they actually “become their thoughts.”

For example, when a player makes a mistake on the field, they replay that mistake over and over, often with a harsh “self-talk” voice beating themselves up about it. Eventually, they “become” that mistake as they struggle to keep playing effectively. In the process, this hyper-focus on negative or obsessive thoughts will most likely have a poor effect on performance. Therefore, it becomes important to realize that you don’t have to be your thoughts and to release negative thoughts as quickly as possible. That is your choice and you do have control. It’s a skill that needs practice, like anything else.





The key is to learn to objectify your thoughts, thus creating a separation between “you” and “them.” Think of it this way - learn to treat thoughts in a similar way that you’d treat sounds, sights, feel, taste and smell. You usually don’t have complete control over your environment, such as the sound of a bird chirping, but these external stimuli always come and always go.

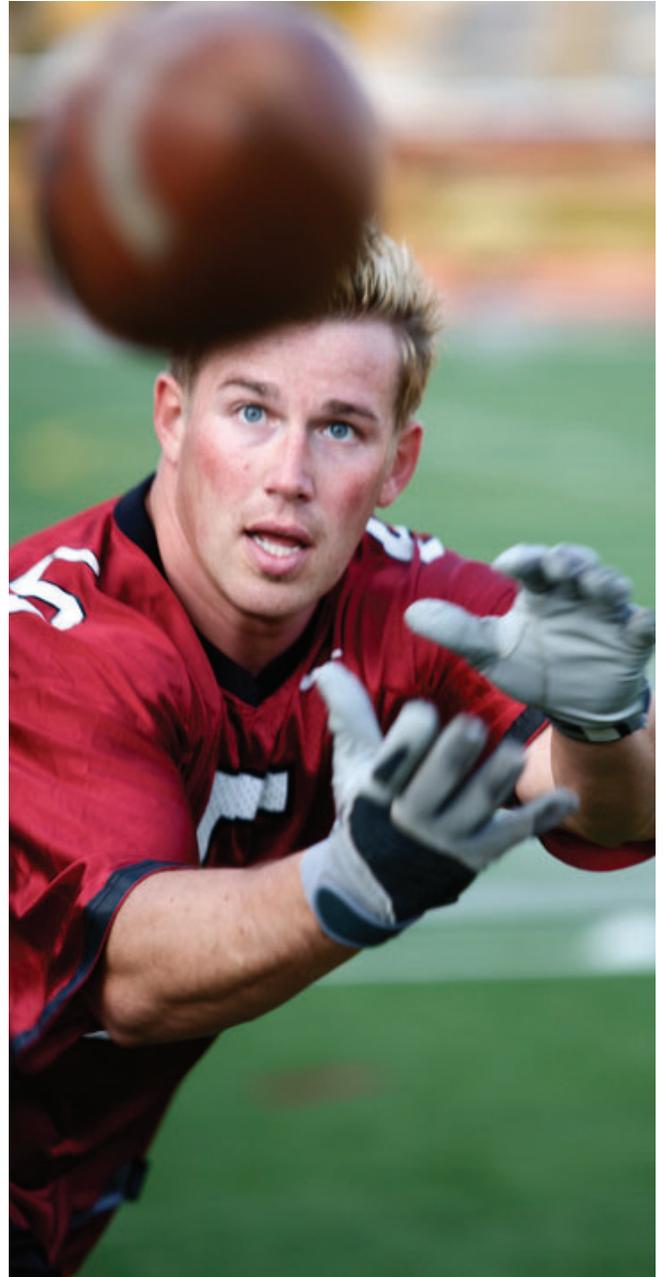
The problem with thoughts is that they have the power to carry us away, to distract us away from what’s happening in the present. For an athlete, distraction is the enemy. Mindfulness is, in a way, the healthy opposite of distraction.

The first step in this process is to simply be aware that you are always thinking, that you have these fleeting thoughts going through your head. You can’t do anything about it until you first become aware. Once you are conscious of your thinking, then you can create a process to distance yourself from intrusive thoughts. Again, you can’t silence your negative thoughts, but you can learn to relate to them in a way that takes their power away.

The Reset Bracelet offers a way to help you remain aware of your thoughts, as well as a simple process to reframe, to switch off unproductive thinking. When you become aware of a negative thought or that it has occupied too much mental space, simply click the button on your bracelet to “reset.” When you do this, you are building your “self-awareness” muscles. It’s not quite that simple though . . .

There is another critical step and athletes are good at this too. Shift attention from your thoughts, to your breathing. Slow down and take 3 deep breaths, paying close attention to your breaths, from the moment they touch the tip of your nose to the last exhale on the 3rd breath.

When you do this (it takes practice), you should find that you’ve interrupted the thought train (even briefly), and reconnected with your body through mindful breathing. You’ve shifted out of your mind and back into your senses. You’ve become tuned in to the present moment - not the one that just happened, or the one that hasn’t happened yet.



This is also the basis of meditation. Most people misunderstand what meditation is and conjure up some image of a mystic in white robes achieving some state of bliss. Meditation is simply spending some focused intentional time - 5 minutes to an hour or so - “watching” your mind. It is the practice of noticing when you get distracted by thought, then bringing yourself back to the present moment, over and over again.

You're not trying to get to complete thoughtlessness (that's impossible) - rather, you're building the muscle of observing your thoughts and bringing yourself back to the present moment. When you do that during competition, you are able to move right through a mistake without worrying about how, why and so forth.

The shift from thinking to just “being” will become more automatic by practicing this simple technique over and over. As an athlete, you will become proficient at moving past mistakes, and keeping your attention on the game itself, allowing your mind and body to access the flow state and, thus, perform your best. You will master the “Reset” and learn to use it on and off the field.



to learn more about our mindfulness training programs:

visit our website: www.humanreset.com

email Peter Bidstrup: pete@humanreset.com

© Peter Bidstrup 2022
www.humanreset.com