



MINDFULNESS AND MEDITATION IN SPORTS

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ABSTRACT

Sports performance has been a topic of research in the past few decades and many studies have been done on factors that affect sports performance. Everything from diet to training methods has been studied. One of the most important aspects of sports performance is the athlete's ability to train the mind to put themselves in the best situation to compete. This can come in many different forms. Mindfulness and meditation are the main areas of focus. Many different theories have been studied. It is important to train the mind just as you train the body. Using the mind, techniques have been shown to increase athletic ability and focus. This paper is about how mindfulness techniques have been used to increase performance and the athletes' ability to cope with inner and external stimuli to increase the competitive edge.

KEYWORDS: Sports, meditation, sports performance, mindfulness.

INTRODUCTION:

Mindfulness meditation is a mental training practice that can be helpful in different situations. It brings you and your thoughts into the present, focusing on emotions, thoughts, and sensations that you're experiencing "in the present." While it can be initially difficult to calm down your thoughts, with time and practice you can experience the benefits of mindfulness meditation, including less stress and anxiety. Mindfulness techniques can vary, but in general, mindfulness meditation involves a breathing practice, mental imagination, awareness of body and mind, and muscle and body relaxation.

Meditation helps players to become more open to their experiences, rather than pushing away from it. If there is an area that they lack in, or need to work on, mindfulness helps in becoming more accepting of those shortcomings. Simply because we do not name them or categorize them as negative or lacking issues- we just put them in a place without any judgment, and look at achieving change with a more accepting mindset.

Anyone who has ever played a sport knows, sometimes the biggest obstacle that stands in the way of success is what's going on inside of our heads. A lack of focus, stress or getting too caught up on past mistakes can sabotage athletic performance. So, how do we overcome this challenge and beat this opponent? Meditation can help.

HERE'S A BASIC TECHNIQUE TO HELP YOU GET STARTED:

1. Find a quiet and comfortable place. Sit in a chair or on the floor with your head, neck, and back straight but not stiff. It's also helpful to wear comfortable clothing so you're not distracted.
2. Try to put aside all thoughts of the past and the future and focus on the present.
3. Become aware of your breath, attuning to the sensation of air moving in and out of your body as you breathe. Feel your belly rise and fall and the air enter your nostrils and leave your mouth. Pay attention to the way each breath changes and is different.
4. Watch every thought come and go, whether it be a worry, fear, anxiety, or hope. When thoughts come up in your mind, don't ignore or suppress them. Simply note them, remain calm, and use your breathing as an anchor.
5. If you find yourself getting carried away in your thoughts, observe where your mind went off to, without judgment, and just return to your breathing. Remember not to be hard on yourself if this happens.
6. As the time comes to a close, sit for a minute or two, becoming aware of where you are. Get up gradually.

Mindfulness meditation helps to break away from destructive and unhealthy thoughts that do not allow the athlete to achieve the goals set.

"I HAVE FAILED OVER AND OVER AND OVER AND OVER AGAIN IN MY LIFE. AND THAT'S WHY I'M SUCCEED". MICHAEL JORDAN

Meditation helps them to go from violet warriors to mindful warriors- In a game, it's kind of like a combat- there needs to be planning and preparing for the task at hand, players have to put up a strong face to begin the battle. A lot of them how-

ever don't realize that competition has led them to become better players in their field. Competition to athletes are like fire: it can either cook your food, keep you warm or it can burn down everything. But mindful awareness teaches us that when we play, we push our rival to become better and vice versa. Once you step back, you can realize how grateful you can be to the person who helped you, motivated you to become better than your expectations.

Meditation has recently grown in popularity, and as more people see the benefits of it, more coaches, trainers and athletes are beginning to incorporate it into their training plans. There are many benefits of meditation in sports, some are:

1. **Better Sleep:** Our bodies recover and repair while we sleep, which is why there are so many negative consequences of not getting enough sleep. From weight gain to increased anxiety and poor motor control, lack of sleep is bad for everyone - not just athletes. Better sleep means faster recovery, less downtime and improved athletic performance. Meditation not only helps us get into a good sleeping pattern, but also helps us get a much higher quality sleep.
2. **Less Stress:** The physical impact of training and the mental pressure of competition are both forms of stress - and even though exercise is healthy, the effects of stress are definitely not. Both physical and mental stresses are associated with inflammation and illness - which we all want to avoid whether we're an elite athlete or not. Meditation combats emotional stress by bringing awareness back to our bodies to quiet the mind. Energy is then freed up for the body to recover more efficiently from the physical impact of training.
3. **Confidence Boost:** Negative thoughts of self-doubt and judgment fuel poor performance by taking our awareness away from the present moment. This lack of mental presence leads to us making even more mistakes and continually worsen our performance. Not only does regular meditation literally change our brains by forming new neural pathways for focus, but it also helps our brains get better at regulating our emotions while breaking down the pathways that encode negative emotions.

Fewer negative thoughts leave us with a quieter mind, which makes it easier for us to locate and connect with our authentic selves. Understanding of who we really are, without all the negative noise, helps us become more self-confident. Gaining genuine confidence in ourselves and our athletic abilities makes meditation a total game-changer.

4. **Ability to Visualise:** Pretty much all of us will have at least a few deeply ingrained negative beliefs about ourselves. Meditation allows us to recognise that these beliefs are not actually truths about ourselves, and that we can shift our thoughts to create new beliefs that embrace our high potential and true abilities. For athletes, this creates an optimal mental state for practicing visualisation techniques- which are proven to have incredible results on performance.
5. **Strong Mind-Body Connection:** Meditation strengthens the mind-body connection, which helps us get in-tune with our true capabilities. When we become more aware of this connection, we're able to reach new heights in our athletic performance. Quiet your mind and bring your awareness into your body... of each individual limb, muscle, and

joint. Not only does this awareness prevent injuries, but it can also help us get into our optimal performance zone.

6. **More Enjoyment, Satisfaction and Motivation:** Have you ever noticed that it's impossible to really enjoy something when your mind is somewhere else? It's no secret that athletes perform better when they are actually having fun. When we live in the present moment, we can easily connect to our feelings of joy, satisfaction and motivation. When we feel satisfied and motivated, we're more likely to follow our training plans, go the extra mile, and ultimately perform at our best.

Whether you're an elite level athlete, or you're in it for fun and fitness - meditation is a proven game-changer! What's more, is that meditation can improve our performance in all aspects of life - from our personal relationships to our productivity levels at work.

7. **Increased Focus:** Meditation has been shown to accelerate brain plasticity, and can directly improve our ability to learn from our training and apply this information in competition. The fast formation of new neural pathways that support memory and concentration enables athletes to stay focused when it counts - and get the best possible results.
8. **Helps Athletes Cope with Pain:** With all the intense training that athletes go through on a regular basis, it's not unusual for them to be in pain or discomfort. According to a recent study, meditation has been proven to sharply reduce a person's sensitivity to pain. The study measured how participants responded to pain before and after attending four 20-minute meditation training sessions over the course of four days. The results showed that participants rated pain 57% less unpleasant and 40% less intense, on average, after they went through the meditation training. These findings show that meditation can help athletes cope with pain, which can help them push through those tough moments of training when it hurts the most.
9. **Meditation Makes It Easier to Enter Flow States:** When athletes get into flow states, they can respond quickly to the chaos of a game. Instead of thinking about how they will score points, their minds and bodies work together to instinctively make the right moves. Meditation, especially mindfulness meditation, makes it easier for people to slip into flow states. Athletes who meditate daily experience more flow states during games.

You can practice mindfulness meditation by paying close attention to your body and surroundings while walking, eating or taking yoga classes. The benefits that you get in daily life will follow you to the athletic field.

10. **Boosts the Immune System:** Not only does meditation help an athlete sleep better, it also helps boost their immune system, preventing illness that could affect their training or competition. Meditation can help lower the chance and severity of illness, allowing athletes to continue to train for success.

CONCLUSION:

Meditation has many key benefits that can help with athletic performance. Athletes who incorporate meditation into their workout routine can be better prepared for competition and have a mental edge on their opponents. While it's important to train the body, it's also important to train the mind. Meditation greatly improves the mind-body connection, which allows athletes of all levels to discover their optimal zone for performance. While it is no secret that the quickest path to mindfulness is through a regular meditation practice, getting into this habit can be quite a challenge in itself. Meditation is a powerful tool, useful both for body and mind. Numerous researches show how meditation in the sports field speeds up the ability to recover from injuries, improves cognitive and concentration skills and reduces stress and anxiety.

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