



# THE WHOLE ATHLETE EXPERIENCE

## FC UNITED SPORTS PERFORMANCE

### KNOW THYSELF: ATHLETE SELF-AWARENESS

Socrates may not have been speaking to the sporting world when he carved the famous phrase into history, but “know thyself” applies perfectly towards the month’s topic “Athlete Self-Awareness”

The Psychological side of the Whole Athlete involves several layers. January’s edition discussed the first layer, involving the power of pursuing excellence instead of perfection. It identified four high-level attributes shared by many elite-level athletes. February’s edition addressed the underlying layer of anxiety caused by nerves or poor self-efficacy that many of those same athletes face. It promoted the athlete’s ability to control his or her response to fear.

For March, we take the concept of The Whole Athlete’s psychological strength one layer deeper as we unpack the impacts an athlete’s mental state holds on his or her level of play.

In the upper echelons of elite sport, there exists a very thin line between winning and losing. At the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008, there was a 5 second difference between first and fourth places in the men’s rowing event. The women’s event posted an even smaller gap. Likewise in the youth sport space, where an estimated 6 out of 7 children aged between 8-18 play a sport in America, many of which aspire to compete in the collegiate and professional levels. This increase in performance densely creates massive pressure for athletes to improve the output in any way possible.

When you already train to near perfection, your nutrition is effective, and your tactical understanding of your game is untouchable, what remains to improve? Your ability to consciously sense your mind’s participation during play-- a.k.a athlete self awareness. To meet this performance demand, the number of athletes honing their mental

skills to improve their self awareness has increased rapidly in the last 10 years to the point where many athletes spend a whole practice session each week channeling their self-awareness to develop their mental training skills. Without the advanced level of consciousness, how can an athlete effectively self-evaluate?

### GREAT ATHLETES POSSESS A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Great athletes are realistic and able to recognize their capabilities and limitations. This does not mean they give up on their dreams or do not try to get better, instead they work within and on their limitations. In practice, great athletes work hard to overcome limitations such as only being able to use one foot or hand during a shot or adjusting their response to being reprimanded by a coach during a drill. During games, they develop game plans and strengths to use their “weapons” or strengths against on opponent’s weakness.

### KNOW YOUR STRENGTHS AND KNOW YOUR WEAKNESSES SO YOU CAN IDENTIFY THEM WITHIN YOUR OPPONENTS

The mental component might be the toughest barrier to climb. When addressing the mental side of skill development, there exists a misconception that the mental aspect is a downfall; meaning, if you need guidance that there is something wrong with you, or asking for guidance from a coach could compromise your playing time.

**THIS IS FALSE. MENTALITY IS A SKILL LIKE ANY OTHER, IT NEEDS CONSTANT DEVELOPMENT AS YOU CHANGE AS AN ATHLETE**



### SELF-AWARENESS AND TEAM SPORT ATHLETES

**Teams are only as good the individuals that build them. Therefore, each athlete serves an individual role for the collective identity. For an athlete to develop wholly, individual self-assessment through self-awareness is equally as important for the team to improve.**



## MINDFULNESS 101:

How can you enhance your self-awareness To increase your self-awareness, try a few of these mindfulness tips. These will concentrate your thoughts.

**LISTEN TO YOURSELF:** Be aware of your self-talking during competition. Is it positive and productive or negative and unproductive? Also, how do you coach yourself when learning skill or tactics?

**LISTEN TO OTHERS & ACCEPT FEEDBACK:** Sometimes the feedback that coaches, parents, and teammates give us is not fun to hear. However, to be your best you most learn from those around you.

**KNOW YOUR BLIND SPOTS:** Talk to others about the things you do that hurt your performance (a hitch in your swing) or relationships with others (a tendency to interrupt others when talking). This requires having a tough skin, but what you can learn helps you avoid acting unintentionally.

**WATCH VIDEO:** Watching videos of past performances can open your eyes whether it is during a slump or just to become more aware of your patterns of behavior in competition.

**SET GOALS:** Spend time thinking about what you want versus what others want for you. What are your goals? These goals then take the priority in training.

**LOOK FOR SIGNS DURING COMPETITION:** When and how do you get down on yourself? What are trouble spots when your performance drops? Knowing this allows you to develop a plan to overcome it.

**POST-PRACTICE AND POST-GAME REFLECTION:** After every game and practice take a few minutes to evaluate what happened in a journal. Ask yourself, did you achieve your goals? Did you follow the game plan? What went well and not so well? What should you work on in practice based on the performance?

\*\*References and research for this newsletter are cited to YLM Sport Science: <https://journals.humankinetics.com/doi/pdf/10.1123/ijpspp.2018-0093> Karageorghis, C. I. & Terry, P. C. (2011). Inside sport psychology, Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

## RESEARCH STUDY:

### MINDFULNESS & SPORTS PERFORMANCE

Reference: by Bühlmayer et al. Sports Med 2017

Designed by eYLM Sport Science



« Mindfulness is a structured mind-set to being aware of the present-moment experience in an accepting, non-judging, and non-avoiding way, which can be understood as a state or trait »

Kabat-Zinn 1994



Mindfulness is increasingly considered meaningful for sport psychological training approaches

## But does it really work ?

### A Meta-Analytic Review

9 trials of fair study quality  
(290 healthy sportive participants)

Intervention time varied from  
4 weeks to over 2 years



### Results

- 1 Mindfulness practice consistently and notably improves mindfulness scores among various sport disciplines
- 2 Physiological and psychological performance surrogates improved to a meaningful extent following mindfulness practice
- 3 Based on available evidence, mindfulness practice can be considered as a performance-enhancing complementary training approach in precision sport disciplines



More research is needed but preliminary results suggested



Higher sense  
of control



Elevated goal-  
directed energy



Higher  
relaxation



Reduced  
anxiety



Lower muscle  
tightness



Decreased  
salivary cortisol

It seems reasonable to consider mindfulness practice strategies as a regular complementary mental skills training approach for athletes, at least in precision sports

**APPROVED**

The results of this study are conducted over a two year span across multiple sport athletes, men and women, individual and team sports.

**CONCLUSION:** Consciously training his or her thoughts and reactions to positively impact performance output in practice and games, significantly increased athletes' results during high pressure play- specifically in sports that required precision and accuracy.

**This starts with the self-awareness necessary to identify where improvements are possible.**

## LOOKING AHEAD:

Keep an eye out for private training opportunities with me this Spring. It all starts with **Sports Performance Spring Break Camp**, March 28th-30th. Check out the **Sports Performance** section of the website or email me at [taylor.h@fcunitedpremier.com](mailto:taylor.h@fcunitedpremier.com) for more details! As always, if you have any questions over the information provided, feel free to reach out.

**- TAYLOR HYNES**