

Mindfulness and Mental Toughness

Submitted by Dr. Natascha Wesch, PhD

The majority of athletes with whom I work come to see me with a variation of the following concern: “I need to get mentally tough because I get nervous and anxious when I play.” Mental toughness comes down to being able to remain focused in the ‘here and now,’ and to be able to perform optimally even in the face of distractions and tough circumstances. This is where mindfulness comes in.

I know what you’re thinking: “Mindfulness is that fluffy meditation stuff that requires you to sit and think of nothing for hours.”



Natascha Wesch

Yes, and no; mostly no. Mindfulness is the skill of being able to focus on the present moment – the ‘here and now’ – which is a vital part of peak performance in sport. As an athlete, you need to find the balance

point between being pumped up enough to compete yet composed enough to focus and make good decisions. That requires being present and being able to let go of distractions.

Here’s an abbreviated version of how mindfulness training works:

1. Use an anchor, such as your breath, to allow you to focus in on the present moment.
2. Recognize that your thoughts about the past or the future are distractions that take you away from the present moment.
3. Know that you can address your distracting thoughts at a later time, so you don’t need to hook into them now.
4. Let go of those distracting thoughts that do nothing for you in the present moment and focus back on your anchor – your breath.
5. Repeat this process as many times as it takes to spend as much time as possible in the present moment.

“Natascha helped me develop the skill of ‘letting go’ and showed me how to be calm and focused on what I needed to do to perform at my best,” said Janika Ozen (a pseudonym). “The mindfulness exercises helped me focus on what matters most. Now I don’t get caught up in thoughts about others or the score or mistakes or anything else. I zone in on what counts.”

Dr. Natascha Wesch is a Mental Performance Consultant Counsellor & Coach in private practice who works with athletes, coaches, and teams of all levels and sport backgrounds. To learn more and to contact her, visit her website: www.elitemindperformance.com

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Mindfulness is a valuable skill in quieting the mind and helping to master the mental part of the game in sport.