

Mindful Sport Performance Enhancement

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There is growing recognition that certain internal states (e.g., flow) and mental skills (e.g., attention and emotion regulation), which are crucial to peak performance and well-being in athletics, are theoretically consistent with mindfulness and can be strengthened through mindfulness practice. Tapping into this connection, *mindful sport performance enhancement* (MSPE) is a structured, easy-to-follow program that trains athletes and coaches to approach their sport with mindful awareness and acceptance, potentially heightening both performance and enjoyment.

MSPE was developed in 2005, and conceptualizes mindfulness as a way of paying attention that entails intentionally being aware of the present moment and accepting things just as they are without judgment. This conceptualization is based on that of Jon Kabat-Zinn (e.g., 1990), whose pioneering work has influenced a range of mindfulness-based interventions in other domains. MSPE is a 6-session, group-based intervention that contains educational, discussion, and experiential components, as well as recommendations for daily home practice. The training is easily adapted to accommodate any sport, level of athletic competition (from amateur to professional), use with a single performer, or even those in other high-pressure domains like the performing arts or business.

Exercises are taught in an intuitive sequence that moves participants progressively from sedentary practice to mindfulness in motion, culminating in a sport-specific meditation that involves paying mindful attention while engaged in core movements of their sport. Emphasis is

also placed on incorporating mindfulness more informally into training, competitions, and life beyond sport.

MSPE was originally designed as a 4-session training, which is shorter than many other non-sport mindfulness protocols, to accommodate the demanding schedules of those in athletics. Three published studies supported MSPE's potential, but also suggested that a longer program could be advantageous. To include additional opportunities for skill consolidation, the training has been expanded to 6 sessions. Our book on MSPE is scheduled to be published by APA Books in August 2017, and serves as both a complete guide to the program and a comprehensive resource on the history, theory, and practice of mindfulness in sport.

Research on MSPE is ongoing around the world and the first randomized-controlled trial was recently completed with NCAA Division III athletes. The effectiveness of the training has now been evaluated across a number of sports with student athletes (in elementary, high school, and collegiate settings), recreational athletes in the community, and collegiate coaches. After MSPE, athletes have demonstrated significant improvements in a number of domains, including increased mindfulness (both overall and specific to sport), dispositional and state flow, life satisfaction, and both self- and coach-rated performance. In addition, they have shown significant decreases in sport-related anxiety, thought disruption during sport, experiential avoidance, difficulties in emotion regulation, and running times (in a study with long-distance runners). Additionally, in a study where comparisons with wait-list controls was possible, results suggested that MSPE could help to prevent escalations in athletes' depressive symptoms in times of stress.

Our presentation at the APA Convention will provide an overview of the MSPE program, as well as practical strategies for its effective implementation as both a participant and a

facilitator. Additionally, a theoretical model of the pathways from MSPE to peak performance will be offered, along with a summary of empirical support to date.