

Introduction

Kelly was a 38-year-old lawyer and elite distance runner who tended to push herself so hard in races that she'd collapse shortly before the finish line. Jasmine was a 12-year-old middle school and club swimmer who was trying to rediscover a love for her sport while feeling exhausted and unfairly criticized by her coach. Peter was a 21-year-old collegiate pitcher who saw his confidence drop while struggling with accuracy fresh off of Tommy John surgery. Taylor was a 44-year-old collegiate volleyball coach who couldn't get his team to the next level. What do these athletes and coach have in common? They were all striving for something, without full awareness of how to thrive in a present experience they deemed unsatisfactory. And each of them benefitted from training in mindfulness, which helped them to face their respective challenges, embrace process over outcome, and reach new heights in achievement and satisfaction.

Mindfulness is a way of paying attention that entails intentionally being aware of the present moment and accepting things just as they are without judgment. This style of attention is characterized by a sense of equanimity that comes from seeing thoughts, feelings, and sensations as constantly in flux. When able simply to watch such experiences come and go, rather than

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Mindful Sport Performance Enhancement: Mental Training for Athletes and Coaches, by K. A. Kaufman, C. R. Glass, and T. R. Pineau

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latch on to and overidentify with them, a person has more opportunity to take in the fullness of any given moment. This awareness and acceptance of “what is” ultimately allows for greater responsiveness to the self and environment, providing freedom from the reflexive or automatic reactions that so often guide actions.

Mindful Sport Performance Enhancement

An explosion of interest in mindfulness has spread throughout the field of psychology, including in the domain of sport, exercise, and performance psychology. This book is intended to be a definitive resource on mindfulness and sport, with specific focus on mindful sport performance enhancement (MSPE), one of the leading mindfulness-based mental training programs for athletes and athletic coaches. MSPE evolved in answer to a call for new, more effective interventions within the field of sport psychology. When we were first developing it in 2005, very little consideration had been given to how mindfulness could impact sport performance. A few notable exceptions at that time, each of which is detailed later in this book, were a study by Kabat-Zinn, Beall, and Rippe (1985) that was presented as a conference poster, a 2004 article by Gardner and Moore, and the work of legendary National Basketball Association coach Phil Jackson (1995), who had his championship Bulls and Lakers teams train in mindfulness.

MSPE is a six-session program rooted in the traditions of Kabat-Zinn’s mindfulness-based stress reduction and Segal, Williams, and Teasdale’s mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, adapted to be unique and specific to athletic populations. Each session includes educational, experiential, discussion, and home practice components, guiding MSPE participants through a structured, easy-to-follow protocol that allows them to learn about mindfulness through their own experience and the experiences of others. Exercises are taught in an intuitive sequence that moves progressively from sedentary practice to mindfulness in motion, culminating in a sport-specific exercise that allows participants to apply the mindfulness techniques from MSPE directly to core skills in their sport (e.g., the putt for golfers, the serve for volleyball players). Special emphasis is also placed on incorporating mindfulness more informally into workouts, practices, and competitions, as well as life beyond sport.

The MSPE protocol can easily be adapted for any sport of interest or for groups (and individuals) representing multiple sports. Our goal with MSPE was to create a program with applicability to any athlete or coach, which teaches not only the fundamentals of this incredibly powerful way to pay attention, but also how to integrate it into real-world training and competitive routines. See Table 1 for an overview of the MSPE protocol.

Over the past decade, we have built a program of research around MSPE with very promising results, studying its impact on coaches and athletes from community, high school, and collegiate settings. Perhaps most exciting are apparent links between MSPE training and the achievement of *flow*, the mental construct often associated with being “in the zone.” As word has spread about MSPE, we have received numer-

TABLE 1**Overview of the Mindful Sport Performance Enhancement (MSPE) Protocol**

Session	Key concepts	Exercises
Session 1: Building Mindfulness Fundamentals	Defining mindfulness Rationale for MSPE Getting off of automatic pilot	Candy Exercise Diaphragmatic Breathing Sitting Meditation With a Focus on the Breath
Session 2: Strengthening the Muscle of Attention	Overcoming practice obstacles Core performance facilitators Present-moment attention	Body Scan Sitting Meditation With a Focus on the Breath review
Session 3: Stretching the Body's Limits Mindfully	Recognizing the power of expectations The body as a route to awareness	Mindful Yoga Sitting Meditation With a Focus on the Body As a Whole
Session 4: Embracing "What Is" in Stride	Letting go of attachments Acceptance versus resignation	Mindful Yoga review Walking Meditation
Session 5: Embodying the Mindful Performer	Achieving through nonstriving Choice in self-care	Sport Meditation Sitting Meditation With a Focus on the Breath, Body, and Sound
Session 6: Ending the Beginning	Ending MSPE Building an ongoing practice routine	Body Scan review Sport Meditation review

ous requests from around the world for additional information and resources, and new lines of research on MSPE are growing in places as far apart as Tennessee, Iran, and Australia. We thus wrote this book so that sport psychologists, athletes, coaches, psychotherapists with clients who are athletes or performing artists, researchers, educators, and anyone else interested in applications of mindfulness for their own personal fitness or performance can have access to a complete guide to MSPE exercises, materials, and theory. The protocol is presented in its entirety, and no background in psychology, mindfulness, or the sport sciences is required to benefit from the content. Illustrative case studies and reflections on how to get the most from the program as either a participant or a leader are provided to take readers' understanding of MSPE to an even deeper level.

The core performance facilitators targeted in the program are also addressed. Engaging these facilitators helps participants apply the primary characteristics of mindfulness (awareness and acceptance) in a manner that promotes essential self-regulatory strategies (e.g., attention and emotion regulation) and optimal performance experiences, in terms of both achievement and enjoyment. Beyond MSPE itself, this volume explores the concept of mindfulness, reasons why it benefits performance, and strategies for overcoming common barriers to this type of mental training. We also include

thorough reviews of the literature on mindfulness and sport to give readers an evidence-based introduction to the science. Because MSPE is one of several empirically based mindfulness interventions available within sport, exercise, and performance psychology, we also offer a broader look at where this movement stands in athletics and other performance realms (e.g., the performing arts) across the globe.

Overview of This Book

This book is divided into four parts, with the nuts and bolts of the MSPE protocol comprising the second part. Part I, *Being a Mindful Performer*, introduces what mental training in mindfulness involves, as well as the role of mindfulness in sport and promoting optimal performance. Chapter 1 (“Overcoming the Mental Training Paradox”) focuses on how to navigate what we call the *mental training paradox*, referring to the widespread phenomenon that, despite general acknowledgment of the importance of the mental game, athletes and coaches rarely dedicate the time to engage in systematic mental practice. Without reconciling this paradox, it is difficult to meet the training recommendations of a program such as MSPE. Chapter 2 (“The Long Past but Short History of Mindfulness in Sport”) defines mindfulness, explains how to assess it, and explores the history of the mindful revolution in sport. An in-depth review describes how mindfulness has gained traction in books for athletes as well as in sport psychology interventions and research around the world. Links between mindfulness and performance are considered in Chapter 3 (“Going With the Flow: Mindfulness and Peak Performance”), which discusses theoretical and empirically established connections between mindfulness and crucial performance factors such as flow, attention regulation, and emotion regulation.

In many ways Part II, *Mindful Sport Performance Enhancement*, is the heart of this book. Chapters 4 through 9 are the MSPE treatment manual, with an entire chapter dedicated to each session of the protocol. These chapters serve as a comprehensive guide, moving the reader through every MSPE concept, exercise, and discussion. Descriptive rationales are provided for each step in the protocol, as are sample scripts of all exercises and examples of discussion questions that could be asked. Recommended home practice assignments and accompanying handouts for every session are available in these chapters and also online, at <http://pubs.apa.org/books/supp/kaufman/>, and audio recordings of the exercises are available at <http://www.mindfulsportperformance.org>.

Chapter 4 (“MSPE Session 1: Building Mindfulness Fundamentals”) explains how participants are oriented to MSPE and introduces important concepts such as nonjudgment and automatic pilot as well as the first two MSPE exercises focusing on mindful eating and breathing, respectively. Descriptions of the performance facilitators promoted through this mindfulness practice and the MSPE body scan, designed to strengthen bodily awareness and attentional flexibility, occur in Chapter 5 (“MSPE Session 2: Strengthening the Muscle of Attention”). Chapter 6 (“MSPE Session 3: Stretching the Body’s Limits Mindfully”) presents the MSPE mindful yoga routine, the first incorporation of motion into the training, along with explaining how partici-

pants can become more aware of and see beyond their expectations, which are often major determinants of performance.

Chapter 7 (“MSPE Session 4: Embracing ‘What Is’ in Stride”) introduces how participants learn to recognize and work with attachments and limits, as well as the MSPE walking meditation, continuing the progression toward more motive mindfulness practice. Harnessing the power of acceptance and nonstriving are foci in Chapter 8 (“MSPE Session 5: Embodying the Mindful Performer”), as is the most applied MSPE exercise, the sport meditation. This practice encourages the use of movements in a sport as anchors for mindful awareness, thus completing the bridge between the training and actual athletic performance. How to conclude MSPE and help participants build an ongoing practice are covered in Chapter 9 (“MSPE Session 6: Ending the Beginning”).

With the protocol unveiled, Part III, *Mindful Sport Performance Enhancement: Theory, Research, Practice, and Beyond*, takes the reader’s understanding of the program to an even deeper level, explaining how and why it works and presenting the evidence base for MSPE, making suggestions for how maximum benefit can be derived, and illustrating implications for new applications in the future. Chapter 10 (“Pathways From MSPE to Peak Performance”) explores the performance facilitators cultivated through MSPE, such as concentration (tuning into experience through a present-moment anchor), letting go (getting unstuck from thoughts and emotions), relaxation (identifying and releasing excess tension), establishing a sense of harmony and rhythm (allowing performance to unfold from a still, nonjudgmental mind), and forming key associations that can serve as cues to be mindful. Then, a summary of the research on MSPE to date and proposed future directions are provided in Chapter 11 (“Empirical Support for MSPE”).

Chapter 12 (“Tips for Participants: Getting the Most Out of MSPE”) highlights the motivational challenges to expect when learning mindfulness and offers suggestions for overcoming those obstacles, based on established behavioral principles and research. Chapter 13 (“Tips for Leaders: Enhancing the Effectiveness of MSPE”) describes the essential components and challenges of being an effective MSPE teacher or group leader within the unique domain of athletics. And, as a future direction for the program, Chapter 14 (“Performance Applications Beyond Sport”) considers the implications of training musicians, dancers, and actors in MSPE. Existing mindfulness-based interventions in these other performance realms and their empirical support are reviewed to help make the case for expanding MSPE training to other domains.

Finally, to vividly illustrate the MSPE process, Part IV, *Case Studies*, details the real-life journeys of two participants through the program in their own words. A collegiate baseball player is the subject of Chapter 15 (“Case Study 1: John the Outfielder”), and Chapter 16 (“Case Study 2: Angie the Basketball Coach”) focuses on the experiences of a collegiate women’s coach.

Programs like MSPE and resources like this book are truly a rarity, and we are excited to be among the leaders of the mindfulness movement in sport, exercise, and performance psychology. We hope that you enjoy the road you are about to embark upon.