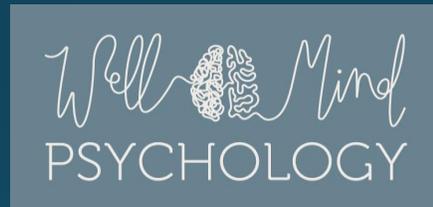


Developing your Mind Muscle: for the Young Athlete



Presenter: Rohan Schlesinger
Clinical Psychologist
Well Mind Psychology, Watson
rohan@wellmindpsychology.com.au
0424 874804

My Background

Clinical Psychologist working in own private practice with interest in the following cohorts:

- **Adolescents and Adults (14 + age range)** : working across a range of difficulties including depression, anxiety, emotion dysregulation, adjustment and transition issues, family-related conflict, school-work related problems, sleep and interpersonal problems.
- **Athlete mental health and wellbeing**: working with young athletes, parents and adult athletes across a range of issues including depression, anxiety, emotion regulation, interpersonal effectiveness, attention and focus skills, resilience building, and identity development.

Previously within both the public mental health sector (CAMHS Southside community team and DBT Program) and a private practice setting (Capital Psychology Clinic, Garran).

Developing your mind muscle: for the younger athlete

We are we going to cover

- How to cope with your life, and maintain your attention and focus on your football performance
- Mental Toughness and Resilience: what is it and how to get it
- Personal Development: how to build motivation, self-confidence, ability to reflect and improve.

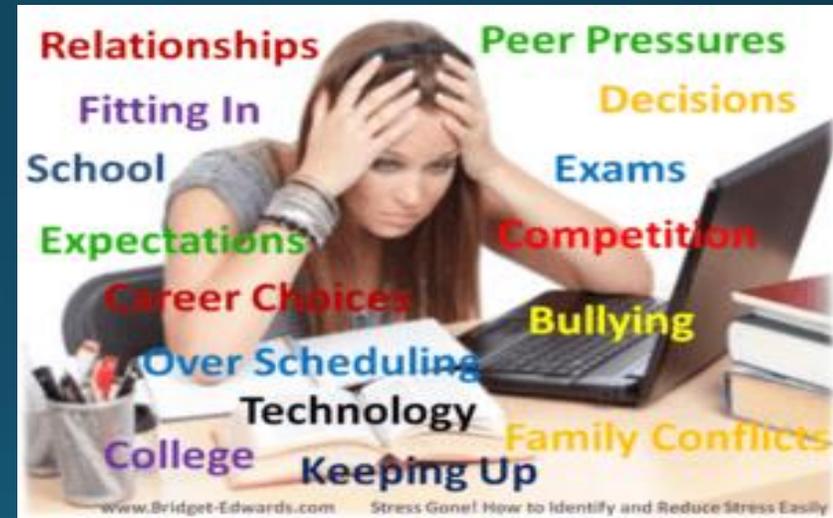
Activity

- 5 - things you can see
- 4 - things you can feel
- 3 - things you can hear
- 2 - things you can smell
- 1 - thing you can taste



Adolescent Life Stressors

- School – academic achievement and relating to teachers/peers
- Social world - friendships
- Developing sense of self
- Living with your family
- Part-time work
- Plus football!!



When you have competing priorities how do you fit it all in?
And how do you keep everyone happy, and yourself?!

Other factors impacting the modern day adolescent athlete

Expectations on performance

Your own.....

Your peers.....

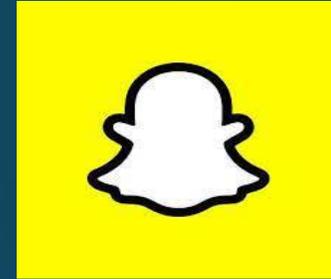
Your coaches....., and

Your family.



Other factors impacting the modern day adolescent athlete

And then there is social media!!



- We are being trained to move our attention rapidly from one thing to the next
- Research shows that adolescents are taking in more information in a day than past generations would in a week!
- We are becoming multi-tasking machine's.....and
- Don't get me started on the unrealistic and unhealthy expectations that you are absorbing

How does this impact your performance (on and off the field)?

Activity time!

Multi-tasking



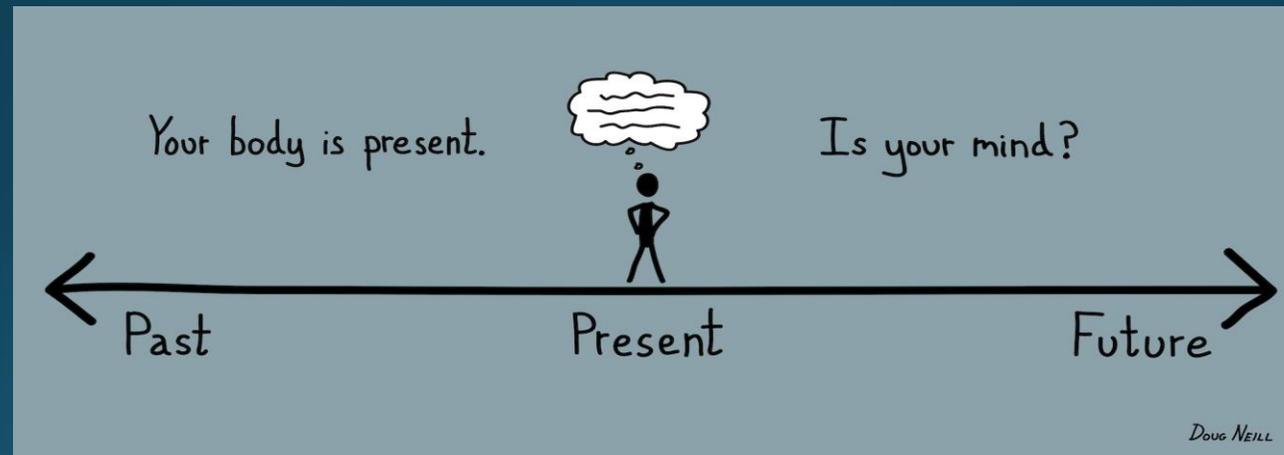
Effectiveness of multi-tasking

- ***Stop multi-tasking.*** Multi-tasking is (1) *not* efficient, according to the latest research, and (2) it can cause information overload, be potentially stress inducing, and cloud one's awareness of thoughts, feelings, and urges [*e.g., see Parker- Pope, 2010*].

But how shall we do this?

Mindfulness

Paying attention: in the present moment,
on purpose,
and with acceptance and non-judgment.
-Kabat-Zinn, 1994



When would it be useful for you, the athlete, to be mindful?

Why use Mindfulness?

Performance

In a mindful state an athlete can most effectively focus or engage their attention to the task at hand and execute the required skill (Gardner & Moore, 2004).



Why use Mindfulness?

Resilience

- Reactivity to strong emotions
 - Reactivity to pain
 - Reactivity to setbacks
-
- When could this be useful in your sport?



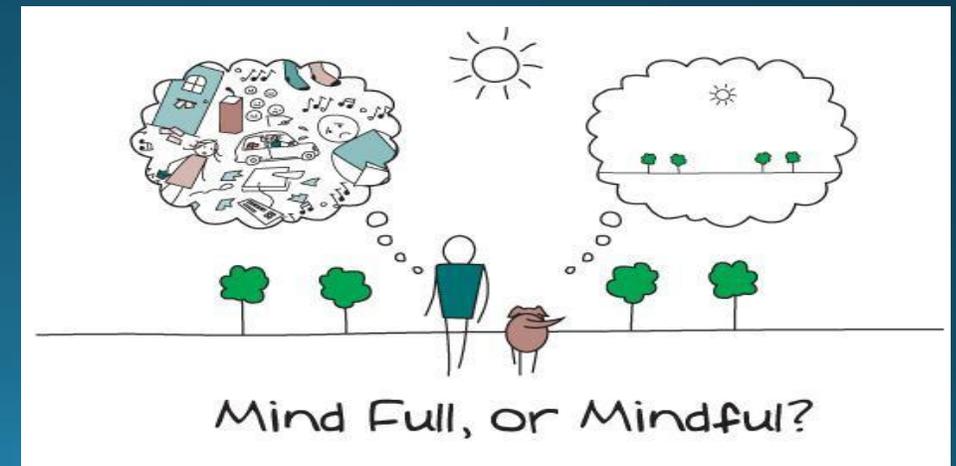
How to be Mindful

Mindfulness is about **zoning in** and being aware of what we are doing in each moment.

It is about **noticing when you zone out** or get caught up in negative thoughts and reactions.

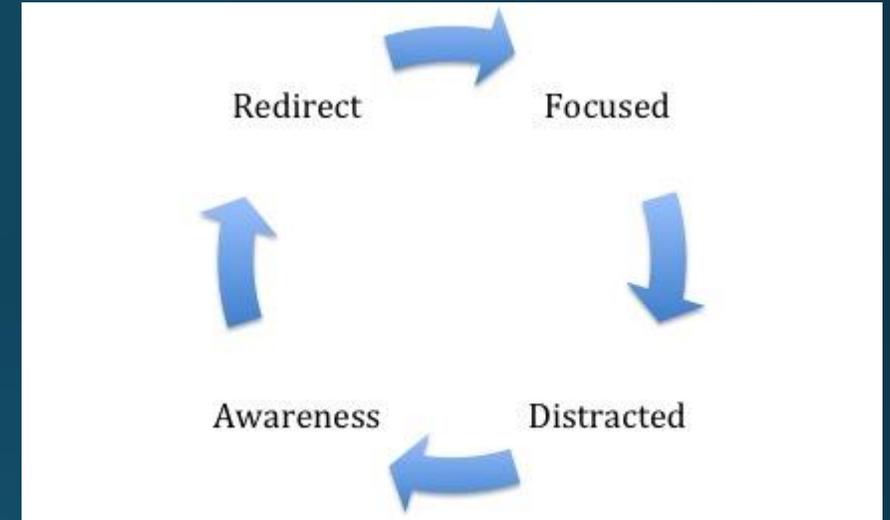
It is about **redirecting your attention** to what you are doing and sustaining attention when you need to.

It's really simple.



Mindfulness Activity

- 90 seconds, focus on your breathe



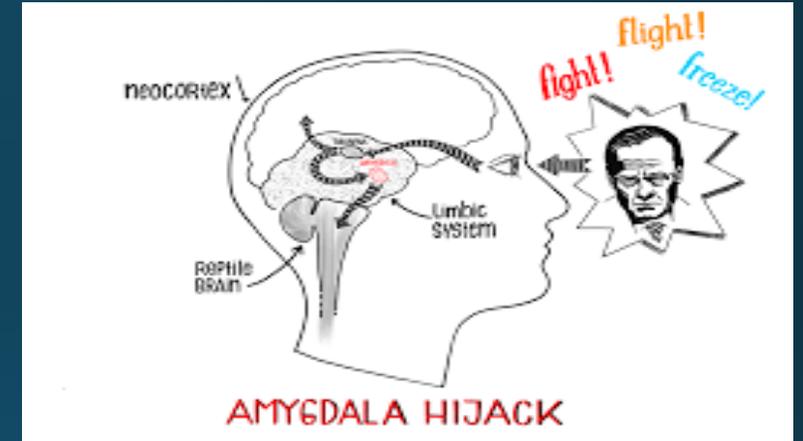
- Recognise your thoughts when you get distracted and come back to your breathe
- It's about being tuned into your body, and out of your head

Mindfulness

**Why is this seemingly simple concept
so hard to apply in practice?**

Your Brain = Your Protector

- It's most important function is to keep you alive
- It does this by ensuring you are always looking for danger
- This survival mechanism often leads us to times in the past or potential events in the future.

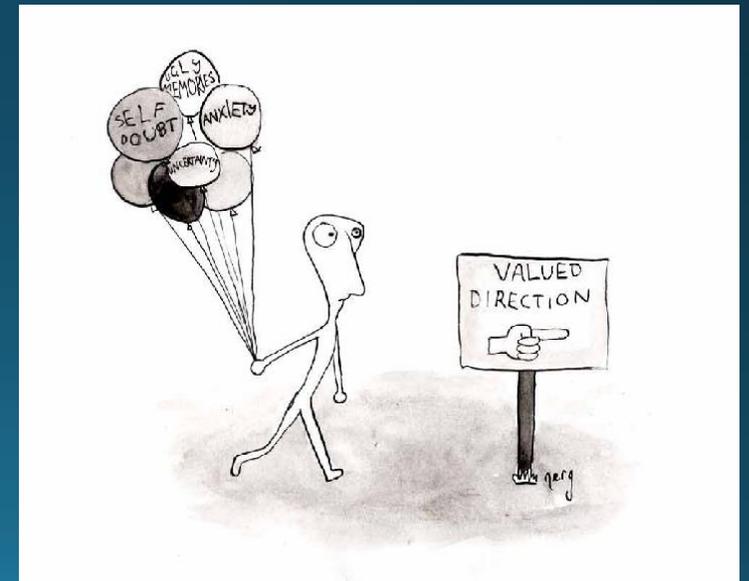


What are the unique challenges to you as a young athlete?



Your Brain = A Thinking Machine

- Thoughts are its business. No way to turn this off.
- At the same time, not all thoughts are created equal and you do not have to “own” or believe them all.
- Mindfulness gives you the chance to choose.



Your Brain = Muscle

With training...

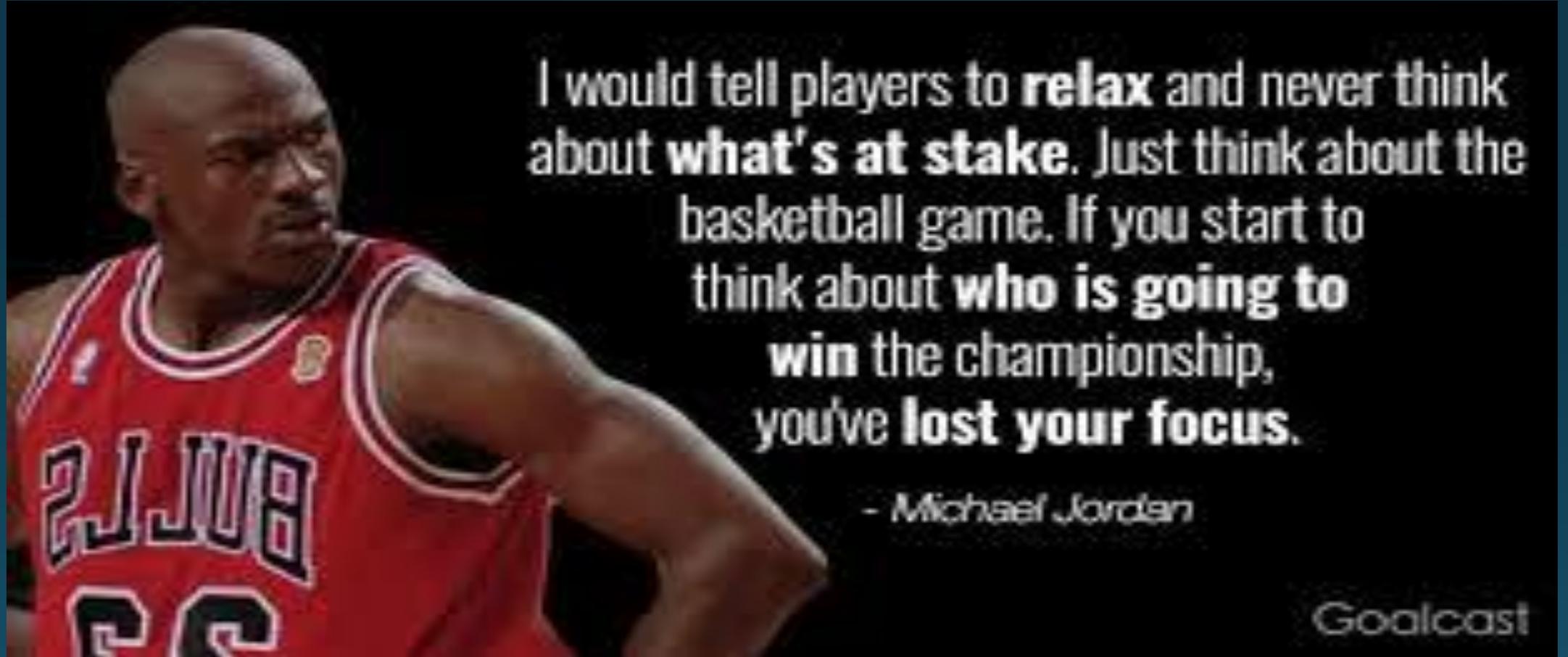
- Parts of your brain linked with paying attention get activated and grow stronger
- Parts of your brain linked with mental chatter and mind-wandering get weaker
- Prefrontal Cortex gets stronger:
 - Faster thinking
 - Better memory
 - You notice more details
 - Plan more effectively

Why athletes use Mindfulness

Professional endorsement

- “Meditation is a way to attain mental toughness, this is absolutely essential to success in cricket, and in life in general”
Justin Langer, Australian Cricketer.
- Alexander Popov, an elite champion swimmer, summarises the mindfulness approach simply and succinctly by stating:
“Who thinks of winning, loses”

Why athletes use Mindfulness



I would tell players to **relax** and never think about **what's at stake**. Just think about the basketball game. If you start to think about **who is going to win** the championship, you've **lost your focus**.

- Michael Jordan

Goalcast

Mindfulness in Sport – Seattle Seahawks



"Meditation is as important as lifting weights and being out here on the field for practice, it's about quietening your mind and getting into certain states where everything outside of you doesn't matter in that moment." Russell Okung, lineman.

"Mindfulness puts an emphasis on focus. I couldn't focus for a long period of time until I got here. It took practice," Thomas said. "You see everything for what it is — you notice it. When it comes to football, how the game moves, I can see everything now. My eyes can expand to see the whole picture." Earl Thomas, Safety.

How can you use mindfulness in training and competition?



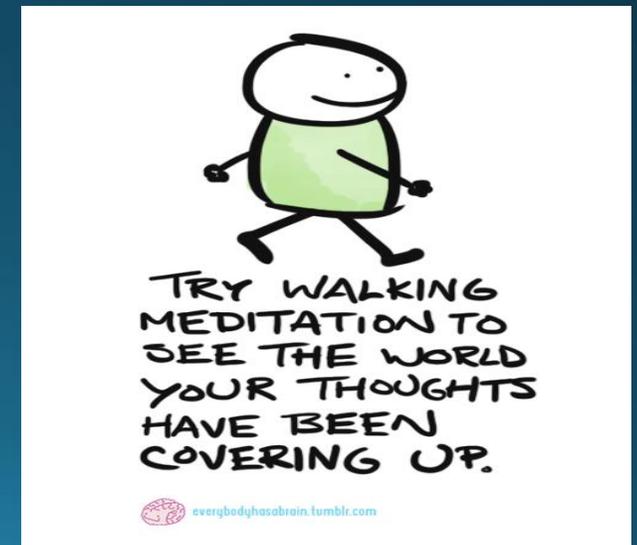
How can you use mindfulness in training and competition?



Some ways athletes develop Mindfulness?

Out of training or competition phases

- Practice breathing exercises, body scan, meditation
 - group or individual.
 - DVD, online, smartphone i.e. Smiling Mind and The Mindfulness App
- Informal mindfulness – walking, eating, brushing teeth, everyday activities



Mental Toughness = Growth Mindset

What Kind of Mindset Do You Have?



I can learn anything I want to.
When I'm frustrated, I persevere.
I want to challenge myself.
When I fail, I learn.
Tell me I try hard.
If you succeed, I'm inspired.
My effort and attitude determine everything.



I'm either good at it, or I'm not.
When I'm frustrated, I give up.
I don't like to be challenged.
When I fail, I'm no good.
Tell me I'm smart.
If you succeed, I feel threatened.
My abilities determine everything.

Success = Michael Jordan = Growth Mindset

"I missed more than 9000 shots in my career. 26 times I was trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."

-- Michael Jordan



Developing your mind muscle: for the younger athlete

What did we cover

- How to cope with your life, and maintain your attention and focus on your football performance
- Mental Toughness and Resilience: what is it and how to get it
- Personal Development: how to build motivation, self-confidence, ability to reflect and improve.

THANKS FOR YOUR TIME

