

MISSING IN ACTION

MASTER YOUR MIND
IN MOMENTS
that matter

AMON WOULFE | DEREK LEDDIE

"The Rapid Reset model is a standout. Out of all the work I personally did with Amon at the height of my powers, the Rapid Reset was the most effective. Having an individualized sequence to get back to my performance zone with incredible speed was revolutionary for me. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in performing to their capability."

- Matthew Hodgson, NBL Center (196 games),
Australian Boomers, FIBA Asia Cup Gold Medalist (2017)

"After using the techniques I've learnt, I see now how I can stay fully present and bring myself back into moments of games where before I would go missing. It's taken my game to a level of consistency I've been seeking for years."

- Joseph Mills, Professional Footballer (349 games),
Southampton, Reading, Perth Glory,
Forest Green Rovers, Northampton Town

"This book isn't just for professional athletes. If you want to take your performance to the next level in any field, this is the book for you. I now view sport and life from a whole different perspective and will implement the learnings into my coaching. This book will change your life."

- Courtney Hancock, 4x Coolangatta Gold Champion,
3x Professional Ironwoman Series Champion,
Sports Commentator, Coach

"Has to be one of the best books on understanding the mind states athletes get into and what to do about it. Practical information that takes away from the outdated concepts many coaches mistakenly believe exist. The mind is the final frontier for elite performance, and it is the coaches that grasp these concepts who will revolutionize high performance."

- Joey Hayes, Elite Fitness Coach,
Ultimate Sports Performance

"Training the mind is crucial if you're serious about getting the best out of your life, whether in sports or more generally. This book covers fundamentals that even those who don't play sports can draw from. It is an invaluable resource for understanding the once-intangible aspects of the human mind and for providing actionable ways to improve your response in the moments that matter."

- Jamie Hocking, Australian Equestrian
Vaulting Champion

"With physiology dominating sports performance, it's rewarding when a resource that allows access to Mental Performance Training. This book gives powerful and easily applied tools to give athletes an edge and raise their self-awareness. We have found that applying these tools has an amazing effect on reducing stress (salivary cortisol) in top performers. An essential resource for any high performing team."

- Chris Wilson, CEO & Sports Scientist,
IPro Australia

"Coaches and athletes have known for decades that the mental component of sport is far more important than the physical. It's the reason so many athletes of lesser talent reach greater heights than the naturally gifted kid. Mental training can be an intimidating, complex challenge, but this book simplifies the process. It provides the mental tools and skills not only to grow and improve, but to reset when things don't go to plan. I highly commend it to any aspiring sports person."

- Graham Cornes OAM, Australian Football Hall of Fame,
Inaugural Head Coach Adelaide Crows AFL

"Understanding and training the mind is certainly vital for the success of high performance teams, Amon and Derek skilfully outline why and what can be achieved. Complex topics are presented in simple language along with very useful examples. These techniques offer profound benefits for optimal human performance."

- Richard Mogg, Lieutenant Colonel,
Australian Army

"As a psychologist and former Army officer, I've seen both sides of the mental performance challenge - the clinical and the operational. This book nails the distinction. It doesn't dismiss the importance of mental health support; it makes the case for something that's been missing alongside it: systematic, skills-based training for the mind under pressure. Practical, evidence-informed, and long overdue."

- CAPT Stephen Halsall, Psychologist,
Australian Army and in private practice

"My mental skills profile clearly articulated both my 'superpowers' and what was holding my performance back. Derek helped expand my mental toolkit, and the 'Rapid Reset' process was a game-changer. I used to over-rehearse for big presentations. Now, I can reset in any high-pressure situation, trust myself fully, and show up more spontaneously and naturally."

- Jason Disborough, AON Chief Commercial
Officer - Pacific, Enterprise Client Leader

"A compelling guide that rethinks mental performance as a trainable skill rather than a fixed trait. Elite sport experience and neuroscience are translated into clear, actionable tools that any leader can apply immediately. As a senior executive, the pressure to perform consistently in high-stakes moments never lets up - this book gives you the edge to do exactly that."

- Paul Rosa, Senior Vice President,
Penske Truck Leasing

"I've spent my career advising clients through moments that can define or destroy them – high-profile legal cases, media crises, situations where every word matters and there's no second take. This book articulated something I've witnessed hundreds of times but never had the language for: why smart, capable people go missing when it matters most, and what to do about it. Practical, grounded, and immediately applicable well beyond sport!"

- Peter Barrett, Crisis PR Adviser and Partner,
Maltin PR

"Missing in Action shines a light on the performance factors hiding in plain sight. It challenges the metrics we tend to prioritize and reveals practical, nuanced opportunities for real improvement. I found it both insightful and immediately applicable to high-risk, high-reliability roles. Entertaining, practical, and genuinely useful."

- Andrew Boniface, EMS Helicopter Pilot
and Human Performance Educator

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IN MOMENTS
that matter

AMON WOULFE | DEREK LEDDIE

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CONTENTS

Preparation

Your #1 Competitive Advantage **1**

Pregame

The Next Frontier **7**



1ST QUARTER

Chapter One

When Athletes Go Missing **15**

Chapter Two

The True Cost of Mental Lapses **37**

Chapter Three

The Rise of Performance Fluctuations **53**



2ND QUARTER

Chapter Four

The Mind Controls the Body **79**

Chapter Five

Toughening the Body Doesn't
Mean You Toughen the Mind **107**

Chapter Six

Performance Not Pathology **131**



3RD QUARTER

Chapter Seven

Make The Invisible Visible **151**

Chapter Eight

Buy Now, Pay Later **173**

Chapter Nine

The Missing In Action Model **195**

4TH QUARTER

Chapter Ten

The Four Low-Performance Mind States **213**

Chapter Eleven

Rapid Reset **251**

Chapter Twelve

The Moments that Matter **287**

Extra Time

Master The Moment **297**

Post Game

Unlock Your Mind **303**



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Amon Woulfe and Derek Leddie are Mental Performance Coaches who work with elite athletes and sporting teams, leading corporate brands, and high-consequence professions to lift performance through the mind.

Mentored by Dr. Don Greene – former US Olympic Sport Psychologist and decorated Green Beret – they have spent over a decade developing a systematic, measurable approach to Mental Performance Training. Their work has helped win championships, taken teams to Grand Finals, and delivered career-best performances when it counted most.

They believe the mind is the next great frontier in human performance – and that it should be trained with the same precision as the body.



Amon Woulfe



amonwoulfe



amonwoulfe



humanperformancegroup.co



amonwoulfe.com

Amon Woulfe is a Mental Performance Coach and founder of Human Performance Group. He has spent over a decade training minds at the elite level - working with top teams in the NRL and AFL, elite athletes in English Football, the NBL, Indian Super League, and Ironwoman, and C-suite executives at brands including Penske, Carnival, 3M, Jaguar Land Rover, Solventum, and Nestlé. His work extends to frontline Ambulance and Police services and the Australian Defence Force. Amon has helped athletes achieve career-best performances, major awards, and international selection across multiple codes. He believes the mind is the #1 untapped competitive advantage in professional sport - and that within five years it will be the fourth pillar of every elite high-performance program.



Derek Leddie

in derekleddie

 theinsidejob.global

Derek Leddie is a Mental Performance Coach and entrepreneur. He built his previous company, The Leading Edge, to \$36 million in turnover before selling the business – an experience that taught him firsthand what exceptional performance and culture look like under pressure. He went on to combine cutting-edge neuroscience with performance psychology to develop practical mental performance tools that work in seconds. Derek led the Mental Performance Training program for the South Sydney Rabbitohs during their 2014 premiership campaign, working alongside Samantha Graham to help break a 43-year drought. He works with elite athletes and coaches across the NRL and AFL as well as corporate executives and emergency services personnel.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We'd like to acknowledge Dr. Don Greene for his wisdom and mentoring in the field of mental performance. We stand on the shoulders of giants, and thank him for a lifetime of work bringing mental performance training into elite environments.

To all the friends and clients who kept encouraging us over the years to get this book out – it nearly went missing in action.

To the visionary coaches and sports administrators who shared our belief in the future of performance, we thank you. Your courage to step boldly into the unknown, and your trust in us to guide you, is truly appreciated.

To Samantha Graham, who worked alongside Derek to deliver the Rabbitohs mental performance program that helped break a 43-year drought – your contribution to this story is deeply valued.

And most importantly, thank you to all the athletes we have worked with. From the elite to the rookies. Without your willingness to open up and share what's really happening in your mind, a book like this wouldn't be possible.



THIS BOOK IS ABOUT YOU,
FROM YOU, AND FOR YOU
– SO THAT YOU MAY
RISE TO MEET ALL
THOSE BIG MOMENTS.

FOREWORD

When I first met Bruce Ogilvie in the early 1980s, he told me something that shifted the trajectory of my entire career:

"Don, we can measure and train every aspect of an athlete's body, but we're flying blind when it comes to the mind. That needs to change."

Bruce, whom we all know as the father of North American Applied Sports Psychology, was already working with NFL teams, major league baseball clubs, and Olympic athletes, but he knew we were just scratching the surface of what was possible.

As a former Green Beret and Army Ranger, I understood pressure from combat zones where lives depended on split-second decisions. As a competitive diver, I'd felt it on championship platforms where everything came down to a single moment. But it wasn't until I worked under Bruce's mentorship that I truly grasped the science behind what happens when the mind goes missing in action, and more importantly, how to get it back.

Bruce and I spent years developing the very first psychological profiles to measure and train performance in the mind – groundbreaking assessment tools that have yielded exceptional results across all domains for decades. We were mapping uncharted territory, trying to understand why some performers thrived under pressure while others collapsed, even when their physical preparation was identical.

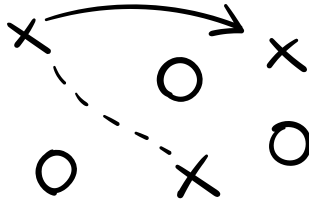
Now, decades later, Amon and Derek have taken that foundational work and evolved it into something Bruce and I could only dream of in those early days. What you're about to read isn't just theory, it's a battle-tested system that has been proven in the crucible of elite competition.

I've had the privilege of mentoring Amon and Derek in their journey to understand the performer's mind. What strikes me most about their approach is how they've combined the rigor of neuroscience with the practical wisdom that only comes from standing on the sideline, watching athletes go missing in action, and knowing exactly how to get them back.

The Missing in Action model they've developed is brilliant in its simplicity. Bruce always said that the best psychological tools were the ones athletes could use in the heat of battle, under real time pressure and consequence. This book delivers exactly that – a practical roadmap for coaches and athletes to navigate the treacherous terrain of the mind under pressure.

I've worked with Olympic gold medalists, professional athletes, world-class musicians at Juilliard, Wall Street traders, and SWAT teams facing life-and-death situations. In my doctoral research with police SWAT teams, I first proved that specific mental techniques could improve performance under extreme stress. In every case, the fundamental challenge is the same:

**HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN OPTIMAL MENTAL
PERFORMANCE WHEN EVERYTHING
IS ON THE LINE?**



**THE ANSWERS ARE
IN THIS BOOK.**

The stories within these pages, from the South Sydney Rabbitohs breaking their 43-year drought to individual athletes finding their way back from the edge of collapse, reflect something Bruce and I always believed: that mental performance training isn't just about fixing problems, it's about unlocking human potential.

Bruce often said that we were only touching the tip of the iceberg when it came to understanding peak performance. This book dives deep beneath that surface, into the four distinct mind states that derail performance, and provides the roadmap for rapid recovery that Bruce and I always envisioned but never fully developed.

The military taught me that you don't rise to the occasion, you fall to your level of preparation. The same is true in sports, in business, in any arena where performance matters. The question isn't whether you'll face moments of extreme pressure; the question is whether you'll be mentally prepared for them.

THIS BOOK IS THAT PREPARATION.

Bruce and I remained close friends until his passing, and I'm deeply gratified to see our work carried forward by Amon and Derek with such clarity, depth, and practical wisdom. They've taken the best of what we learned and built something even better, a comprehensive system for mastering the mind in the moments that matter most.

Whether you're a coach watching your players struggle under pressure, an athlete tired of inconsistent performance, or someone in any field where mental toughness determines success, this book will change how you think about the mind and give you the tools to master it.

Bruce would be proud, as am I.

Dr. Don Greene, PhD

Peak Performance Psychologist

West Point Graduate, First in Class to join Green Berets

Olympic Coach – 15 Gold Medals, 41 Olympic Medals

14 World Records, 50 World Championship Medals

*"We are now
understanding
that Mind
Training is as
important, if not
more important,
than other facets
of what we're
practising."*

Michael Maguire

Dual NRL Premiership-winning head
coach (South Sydney Rabbitohs 2014,
Brisbane Broncos 2024)



Pregame

**YOUR #1
COMPETITIVE
ADVANTAGE**

The mind is under more load than any time in human history. We are living through the most mentally demanding era in human existence.

Your mind is the most sophisticated system evolution has ever created – more complex than any supercomputer, more powerful than any technology we've built. You have the most sophisticated performance system on the planet sitting between your ears. Yet nobody gave you a manual on how to operate it.

Human attention spans have collapsed, screen-based focus has plummeted from 2.5 minutes in 2004 to just 47 seconds in 2025. People now process information equivalent to 174 newspapers daily – five times more than in 1986. Peak burnout now occurs at just 25 years old, 17 years earlier than previous generations. Anxiety, distraction, burnout and mental exhaustion have become the norm, not the exception.

And nowhere is this more evident than in elite sport.

Athletes today face pressures previous generations never encountered: 24/7 social media scrutiny, online trolling, instant global judgment, and performance tracked by dozens of metrics. They're expected to be role models, brand ambassadors, and flawless performers – all while maintaining peak physical condition.

Yet despite this mental battlefield, most athletes receive zero systematic training for the one thing that controls everything else: their mind.

Every athlete trains their body with scientific precision. Hours in the weights room, on the track, perfecting skills. They

measure everything – speed, strength, endurance, technique.

But when it comes to training the mind, there's a massive barrier that's held the industry back for decades.

WHAT MENTAL PERFORMANCE TRAINING ACTUALLY IS

Mental Performance Training is the systematic, data-driven development of the mental skills that allow you to perform at your best when it matters most. It's about training your mind with the same precision, measurement, and scientific approach you use to train your body.

Think of it this way: if you want stronger legs, you do squats. If you want faster reflexes, you do reaction drills. If you want a clearer mind under pressure, you systematically train mental performance skills.

This is structured, skills-based training for the mind. Measurable. Data-driven. Systematic. Game-focused. Tools that work in seconds, when the pressure's on.

There's a critical distinction between working on the mind for wellbeing and working on the mind for performance. When a player goes missing under pressure, the traditional approach asks: *'What's wrong with them?'*

Mental Performance Training asks a different question: *'Which skill needs work, and how do we get them back in the game – fast?'*

WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

Every athlete today is physically exceptional. Strength and conditioning programs are nearly identical. Technical skills coaching is comprehensive. Tactical preparation is thorough.

So what separates the best from the rest?

The mind.

Coaches have been saying '90% of sport is mental' for decades. Yet how much time do you spend training the mind? How much of your budget goes toward mental performance?

For many coaches and athletes, the answer is zero.

That's your competitive advantage.

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

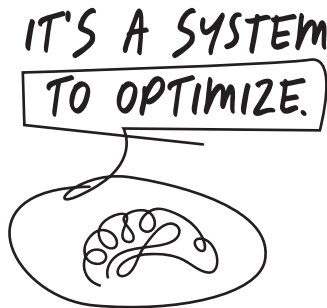
This book gives you three things:

1. **The Map** – Where exactly does the mind go when athletes check out?
2. **The Scorecard** – How do you know what mental skills need development?
3. **The Reset Button** – How do you reset the mind in seconds under pressure?

We're not trying to turn you into a sports psychologist. We're giving you practical, proven methods that work on game day, when everything's on the line.

Stop thinking of your mind as a problem. Start thinking of it as your secret weapon.

THE MIND
ISN'T A PROBLEM
TO MANAGE.



That's what this book is about. Not theory. Not motivation. Training.

*"It's all
about mental
training."*

Simone Biles

Most decorated gymnast in history,
11x Olympic medalist



Warm Up

THE NEXT FRONTIER

On the biggest stages and in the biggest moments, athletes go missing.

We've all watched it happen. The best player, the one who's been trained for years, suddenly can't catch a ball they'd normally take in their sleep. The team that dominated all season gets blown off the field in the finals. The athlete who never misses from that distance sends it sailing over the posts.

They haven't forgotten how to play. Their bodies haven't suddenly become weaker. Their skills haven't evaporated overnight. Their minds have gone missing in action.

Mental Performance Training is the next frontier of high performance in sport, and in all other arenas as well.

*"80% Mental and 20% physical.
It seems obvious. People
always say that, but they
do not do anything about it!"*

- Aaron Gordon, NBA Player

We have written this book with a focus on sport because sport provides a clear illustration of what can happen to the mind under pressure. But this book is not just for athletes and coaches.

It's for CEOs, emergency services workers, defense force personnel, pilots, surgeons, engineers, lawyers, performance artists, financial traders, public speakers, entrepreneurs – indeed, it's for anyone who needs to perform at their best when they're under pressure. If this is you, then you'll find

many valuable insights in these pages.

We have seen this problem up close. Working with championship-winning teams and individual athletes across multiple codes, we've watched supremely fit players simply disappear when it matters most. We've sat in coaches' boxes as talented teams collapsed under pressure, and we've worked with athletes whose careers were defined not by their ability, but by their inability to stay present in crucial moments.

Missing in Action tells the tale of coaches who have watched their players choke on the field, despite the countless hours of training they have led. Such conspicuous failure is always painful, and we have seen coaches respond in many ways, including with anger, frustration, confusion and even despair. We have seen great coaches lose their jobs because they can't figure out what's going wrong.

According to conventional thinking, they've been doing everything right. They have the game plan, the strategy, and they've drilled their players on it. They have established a relentless schedule of physical training. And when their players don't perform, they've used tactics ranging from a quiet chat to a roasting, to dropping them for a week.

This book is for every person who knows there must be a better way, that perhaps an aspect we've been largely unaware of might make all the difference. Our aim is to provide you with the information and skills you need to traverse the territory of the mind with simplicity and clarity. We want to help high performers answer a common question:

Where does my mind go when I'm under pressure?

Over the last couple of decades, neuroscience has created a pool of wisdom that's changed how we train performance forever. Neuroscience has virtually become modern-day magic, making the invisible visible.

It has made training mental skills tangible and real. Today we can train the mind directly, rather than through the body. The mind is no longer some woo-woo hippie stuff, it's the greatest untapped area of performance, and we're only just beginning to understand it. Missing in Action is built on incredible insights from this exciting field.

Working on the mind, like working on the body, needs specific tools, skills, techniques and approaches that build the resilience to thrive under pressure. What we present to you here has taken thousands of hours to discover and refine. We know it works, because we've seen it happen.

We have worked with championship-winning teams, helped struggling clubs transform into finals contenders, and guided individual athletes to career-best performances, major awards, and international selection. Derek led the Mental Performance Training program for the South Sydney Rabbitohs during their historic 2014 premiership campaign – a team that broke a 43-year drought, a story we'll tell in full at the end of this book. Our methods have been tested across multiple professional leagues – NRL, AFL, NBL, English Football League, and Indian Super League, as well as with emerging talent and Olympic pathway athletes.

The results speak for themselves: teams that had consistently collapsed under pressure learned to perform their best when it mattered most. Players who had been haunted by

mental barriers broke through to achieve what they'd always believed was possible.

But it's not all about sport. We have trained over 5000 people across corporate leadership environments worldwide, working with C-suite executives, senior management teams, and high-performing organizations navigating complex business pressures.

We've also applied these principles in high-consequence professions where mental performance can mean the difference between life and death - emergency services workers who must stay calm when lives hang in the balance, military personnel operating under extreme stress, and professionals in healthcare, aviation, and public safety where split-second decisions matter.

Whether you're a corporate leader facing a board presentation, a surgeon in an operating theater, a pilot managing an emergency, or a parent dealing with crisis, the mind's response to pressure follows the same patterns.

So this is a book for everyone who wants to be at their best in the moments that really matter.

This book has emerged from years spent in stadiums, training fields, and dressing rooms where the real work happens. It's written in the language of athletes and coaches who live this reality every day.

For too long, we've accepted that minds go missing under pressure. We don't have to anymore.



1ST QUARTER



*"I don't think
one can explain
what happened..."*

Carlo Ancelotti

Manager of AC Milan



CHAPTER 1

WHEN ATHLETES GO MISSING

These eight words uttered by Carlo Ancelotti after AC Milan's loss to Liverpool FC in the 2005 Champions League Final – the 'Miracle in Istanbul' – will remind every coach of their worst nightmare.

Milan had a three-goal lead at half time, having completely outplayed Liverpool, whose fans were already leaving the ground. Even the players were joking that it was all over. Then something happened. In six minutes that shook the world, Liverpool scored three goals, and went on to win by penalties. Liverpool came, and Milan went missing.

Like so many coaches before him, Ancelotti was asked to explain what had happened to his team – but he simply couldn't.

What if we could?

What if there was a pattern to these collapses – a universal map showing exactly where athletes go mentally when they disappear from the game?

Athletes go missing in action on the field. Of course, we don't mean they actually disappear from the field. We mean that, when under pressure, some athletes mentally check out. This problem isn't new; it's been happening since the dawn of sport. Any fan can reel off a list of the great collapses in sporting history:

- ➔ Paris Saint-Germain in the 2022 Champions League second leg vs Real Madrid
- ➔ The Atlanta Falcons in the 2017 NFL Super Bowl
- ➔ New Zealand in the 2007 Rugby World Cup quarterfinal

- AC Milan in the 2005 Champions League final
- South Africa in the 1999 Cricket World Cup semifinal
- Greg Norman at the 1996 Masters of golf
- Roberto Baggio in the 1994 Football World Cup final

These moments, and many more like them, are forever etched in our memories.

Here's what it can look like on the field. The game is in full flight, and a player makes an error. They drop the ball, or turn it over. Within seconds, their eyes drop, their shoulders slump, their body collapses. Their mind starts to 'float'. They've become a spectator. Their energy level collapses, and they're two steps behind the play.

What do coaches do when this happens? When an athlete goes missing, most believe they have only a few options. Pull the player off, move them around, or give them a spray to try to fire them up. How else can you deal with them, right?

**WELL, WHAT IF WE TOLD YOU,
THERE IS ANOTHER WAY. //**

That there are simple tools and techniques to help you get your team back in the game – even when you're in the coach's box and they're out on the field.

But first let's take an in-depth look at the problem. We see players go missing all the time. Maybe a player hasn't had the ball for a while, so they are getting frustrated. They're

not following the game anymore. They are getting annoyed with themselves and with their teammates. They look erratic and lack cohesion. They're on the field but having no impact. They're a passenger.

Sometimes athletes realize they have mentally checked out of the game; more often they have little or no awareness. Everyone else can see it – coaches, fans, even the opposition. To everyone watching on TV and from the stands, it's obvious the player is no longer in the game anymore.

THE COACH'S PERSPECTIVE

Coaches see the symptoms: their players are floating, spectating, getting angry or anxious. They watch their top athletes' performance plummeting. How often do the TV cameras zoom in mercilessly on an irate coach in the box, smashing the phone against the glass and yelling expletives? They are crying out in despair, desperately trying to understand: *'What the f*** are they doing out there, and where the f*** have they gone?'*

Coaches have shared with us that often before games they have no idea whether their players will 'show up' or go missing when the game's big moments come. Sometimes the players can look ordinary before the game and then go out and perform incredibly; at other times they look totally on beforehand and then get blown off the field. It's like Russian roulette: there's no certainty in the coach's mind about whether the players will be mentally present at the critical stages.

Even though it's been happening for decades, most coaches haven't had the tools or language to understand where their players go, or how to get them back. On the outside, coaches look and act like they know what to do. They know they must be seen to have the answers. That's what they are employed to do. You can't be the head coach of an elite sporting team and not have the answers!

But the truth is that many coaches feel powerless. Coaches see players check out, and all the coach wants to do is help, to be able to get their players back into the game – but aside from ordering tactical changes, they've got no idea what to do. Second by second the match slips away, and another page is written in the history of teams going missing under pressure.

It's worth remembering that many coaches are also former players: at one time, they were able to run across the white line and affect the outcome. Coaches can remember what it's like to drop the ball, get angry, miss a simple goal. Those moments happened to them back when they were players.

WHERE DO PLAYERS GO,
AND HOW DO YOU
GET THEM BACK?

@#\$\$%

So when coaches see players go missing, they want to run out there – but they can't. Instead, they bellow down the phone, sending messages to players on the bench, ordering, commanding, trying to exert control. Their heads get busy problem-solving, running tactics, over-thinking and they start to feel overwhelmed as well. The pressure gets to them, too.

There is a lot on the line for a professional coach. Their careers are often very short. In the 2017-18 NBA season, Dwane Casey, head coach of the Toronto Raptors, led the franchise to a record 59-win season, making them the top seed in the Eastern Conference. He was also voted the 2018 National Basketball Coaches Association's coach of the year by his peers. Three days after the team was comprehensively swept out of the NBA playoffs by the Cleveland Cavaliers, the Raptors' most successful coach was fired. It took 82 games for him to become the best coach in the league, and four playoff games to undo it.

When a team fails, it's rarely the players who get fired first. The coach has been tasked – solely, and perhaps unreasonably – with getting young athletes to perform well and win week after week. And if the team doesn't win, it's the coach's head on the chopping block. They know deep down that if they don't get the team performing, sooner rather than later it'll mean their job. As they say, if you don't get winning, you get going.

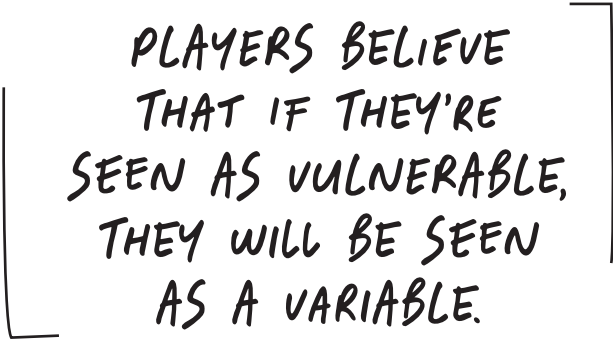
What most coaches don't know is that there is a very simple and universal model for understanding where the mind under pressure goes missing, and how to help their players – and themselves – find their way back into the game.

THE PLAYER'S PERSPECTIVE

Meanwhile, back in the player's mind, we find fear, doubt, anxiety. They are often terrified of not being 'switched on' in the critical moments.

Think of any memorable sporting moment where an athlete has gone missing or 'choked'. There's always a sense of 'why did this happen to me? It's not meant to be this way! Things weren't meant to happen like this!' They feel the pressure grab them - like a monster that jumps out of the closet - and they don't know what to do about it. They don't know where it comes from, and they don't know how to free themselves of its grip. It's as much an anomaly to players as it is to coaches.

Then players start to think there's something wrong with them. But they won't admit that to anyone, of course, because if they do open up about their fears, they become seen as a risk, and they lose the very thing that matters most to them: the chance to play the next game.



PLAYERS BELIEVE
THAT IF THEY'RE
SEEN AS VULNERABLE,
THEY WILL BE SEEN
AS A VARIABLE.

How do we know this to be true? Players tell us. When we create a safe environment for players to talk about what happens in those crucial moments, they share the truth: their mind is often full of a thousand anxious thoughts. In a game that can turn on a second, every second is valuable. So checking out even for just a second can cost a game.

Think about JR Smith in Game 1 of the 2018 NBA Finals. Cleveland Cavaliers versus the Golden State Warriors. The Cavaliers are massive underdogs – nobody gives them a chance. But LeBron James is playing the game of his life. Fifty-one points. Eleven rebounds. Eight assists. Carrying his team on his back. Giving them every opportunity to steal Game 1 on the road, to shock the world, to shift the entire momentum of the series.

In the NBA Finals, one game can change everything. Win Game 1 on the road as the underdog, and suddenly the impossible feels possible. The pressure shifts. The narrative shifts. Belief floods through your team.

Final seconds. Score 107-106 Warriors. The entire season has come down to this moment. George Hill steps to the free throw line for two shots. The Oracle Arena holds its breath. He makes the first – game tied 107-107. He shoots the second. It rattles off the rim. The rebound comes off long.

And there's JR Smith, in perfect position, grabbing the offensive rebound with 4.7 seconds left on the clock.

The ball is in his hands. The rim is right there. One shot away from a stunning road win in Game 1. One shot away from silencing the Oracle Arena. One shot away from transforming

the series. LeBron's heroic performance is about to be rewarded. The upset is there for the taking.

But somewhere in those final seconds, JR appears to have lost track of the moment.

Instead of shooting, he dribbles. Out toward the three-point line. Away from the basket. Back toward half court. The clock is ticking. Four seconds. Three seconds. Two seconds. LeBron is screaming, arms raised, begging for the ball. The Cavaliers bench is on their feet, yelling. Everyone in the building knows what needs to happen except the one person who matters.

The buzzer sounds. Overtime.

JR turns to LeBron on the court, hands spread. He appears to mouth: 'I thought we were ahead!'

Watch LeBron's face in that moment. It's not anger. It's devastation. The realization that fifty-one points, that Herculean effort, that once-in-a-lifetime performance might have just slipped away.

The Cavaliers lose in overtime. They lose the series 4-0. The season is over.

Afterward, nobody can fully explain what happened. JR insists: *'I knew we were tied. I thought we were going to call a timeout.'* Coach Tyronn Lue tells reporters: *'He thought it was over. He thought we were up one.'* LeBron walks out of the press conference, telling reporters: "Be better tomorrow."

Where was JR's mind in that moment? Under the enormous pressure of the Finals, with the noise of the crowd, the weight

of the moment, the complexity of the situation – his mind couldn't access the information he needed. Perhaps his focus had narrowed. Perhaps his thoughts were racing about what to do next, what play to run, what the defense might do. Perhaps the stress of the moment created exactly the kind of mental fog we've been talking about throughout this book.

It happens. Even to professionals. Even in the biggest moments. That's not a character flaw. It's the human brain responding to extreme stress.

JR Smith isn't a bad player. He's not weak-minded. He's not someone who doesn't care. He's a professional athlete who has made clutch plays throughout his career. But in that moment, his mind went missing – and he didn't have a tool to reach for. That's a skills gap, not a character flaw. And skills can be trained.

Seven seconds. A winnable game lost. A Finals series that never recovered. The difference between a legacy-defining moment and a moment that haunts.

TEN SECONDS CAN CHANGE EVERYTHING.

Often, the problem of players mentally checking out is more than just seconds. Players have admitted to us that they've tuned out for up to half the game. We're talking about a significant chunk of time where they know they are not mentally switched on, and are therefore not performing at their best.

Yet they don't know what to do about it, so they run faster, try harder and over-focus. Players assume their focus will magically reappear. They think to themselves, if I sprint for long enough, eventually I'll switch on again.

The fears players hold are the elephant in the change room: the coaches dance around them, and the players don't want to talk about them. No one wants to admit to their teammates that they've been running around in a fog, or they're getting critical, or they're highly agitated. So they remain silent.

And the clock just keeps ticking... and then the match is over.

No player wants to let the team down, but they are. They don't talk about what's going on in their mind because the coach doesn't talk about it. And because the coach doesn't talk about the mind, no one trains the mind. Nothing progresses because it isn't named, it isn't discussed.

IF WE DON'T NAME IT,
WE CAN'T TAME IT.

And without a shared language between coaches and players to describe what's happening, both sides remain isolated – each struggling alone with a problem that affects them both.

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

What's needed is to build an understanding and a shared language between coaches and players concerning the mind. Yet right now it's a tale of two cities.

**TWO SEPARATE WORLDS,
EACH UNABLE TO
REACH THE OTHER.**

In the first city – the coach's box – frustration reigns. The coach is sitting high above the field, furious at the player, finger-pointing and shouting at the assistant coaches. *'Where the f*** have they gone? What are they doing out there? Are they daydreaming? Why don't they pull their f***ing finger out?'* From this vantage point, the solution seems obvious: the player just needs to snap out of it, to try harder, to care more.

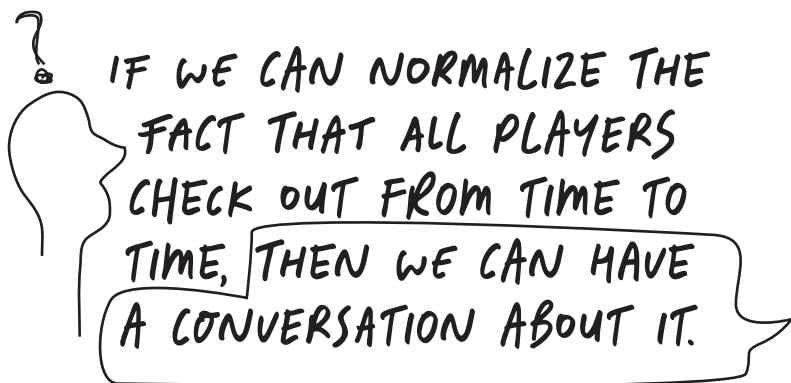
In the second city – inside the player's head – chaos reigns. The player is thinking: *"I am a star player and I haven't had the ball for 10 minutes. I'm so frustrated, and I'm getting worried. What will the media write about me on Monday? I'm meant to be scoring. I look like a complete failure. What is the coach thinking? My performance is dipping – what do I do? Hurry up and do something – it's getting worse. Why*

me? Why is this happening to me?" From this perspective, the coach's instructions are just more noise in an already overwhelming storm.

These two cities exist in the same stadium, in the same moment, during the same game. Yet they might as well be on different planets. When faced with the same situation, both sides are speaking different languages, operating from different realities. The player cannot shift into high performance because they don't know how, and the coach can't help because they don't understand what's happening.

The breakthrough comes when we build a bridge between these two cities – when coach and player share the same map of the mind. Sometimes we have witnessed a watershed moment – a turning point – when a coach finally understands where a player goes. Upon realising this, the coach's whole attitude changes. They then realize that it is within their power to help players master their mind.

The challenge becomes: how quickly can I notice when I get into that space? And how quickly can I get myself back to high performance?



When checking out becomes a normal, expected part of high-pressure performance rather than a character flaw or weakness, everything changes. Players and coaches can finally have honest conversations about it – and more importantly, they can train for it. It's no longer about hiding the problem; it's about building the skill to recover from it faster than your opponent.

THE ARMCHAIR PERSPECTIVE

The 2013 Denver Broncos had the greatest offense in NFL history. Not one of the greatest – the greatest. They scored 606 points that season, a record that still stands. Peyton Manning threw 55 touchdown passes, also a record. Five different players scored at least 10 touchdowns. They topped 40 points six times and surpassed 50 three times. They were a machine that nobody could stop.

They swept through the playoffs and arrived at Super Bowl XLVIII as overwhelming favorites. Manning had just won his fifth MVP award. The offense had been so dominant all season that the only real question seemed to be the margin of victory.

Twelve seconds into the game, the snap sailed over Manning's head for a safety. From that moment, the Broncos unraveled. The offense that had been unstoppable all season couldn't function. Manning threw two interceptions. By halftime it was 22-0. The second half opened with a kickoff return for a touchdown. Nothing worked. Nothing made sense. The

most prolific offense in NFL history scored just 8 points on the biggest stage of them all. Final score: Seattle 43, Denver 8.

The usual explanations were severely lacking. Manning can't win the big one. They weren't prepared. They came out flat. Seattle's defense was too good. They didn't want it enough. They choked. They had an attitude problem. The coach got it wrong.

None of it explained the true conundrum: how does the greatest offense ever assembled go from 606 points in a season to 8 points in the only game that mattered?

Without a language to understand what happens in the mind, we've ended up with a sporting industry full of clichéd and inadequate explanations that fail to explain the real question:

WHY DO PLAYERS GO MISSING UNDER PRESSURE?

Throughout this book, we will show exactly what happens in players' minds, why the conventional explanations fall short, and how Mental Performance Training can change the outcome.

But first, let's examine why the conventional wisdom has failed us for so long.

THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

When players go missing under pressure, coaches typically follow a predictable sequence of responses. Each of these responses contains a kernel of truth – physical preparation matters, attitude does affect performance, accountability is important, and sometimes roster changes are necessary. But when these become the only tools in the toolkit, applied without understanding what's actually happening in the player's mind, they tend to follow a downward spiral – each solution responding to the failure of the last.

Step 1: The Physical Fix

The first widespread belief is that only through physically challenging training does the mind become more resilient. So when a player or team misses a crucial moment, the conventional coach's remedy is to bring them in on their day off, add extra physical sessions and train them twice as hard, in the hope of beating the issue out of them. *'They didn't try hard enough! They didn't bring enough effort!'* Such a coach is looking to the physical to solve an issue in the mind.

Step 2: The Attitude Problem

When harder training doesn't work, the coach moves to the second belief: if it isn't a physical issue, the players must have an attitude problem. The belief is that they're aware of what

they're doing, and doing it with intent. *'They're just not hungry enough! They don't respect the game! They don't want to win! They don't have enough heart!'*

Step 3: The Carrot and Stick

The blame game then moves to the next level: if it's an attitude problem, then motivation through fear is the answer. Here the coach threatens players with being dropped. *'Their attitude is just not acceptable! There will be big changes next week! Play well or you're out.'*

Step 4: The Final Cut

This leads us to the final conventional belief: if none of this works, then there must be something fundamentally faulty with this player, and we need to cut or trade them and get someone better. We've had to make some hard decisions, and this individual is just not the right fit for our club.

This downward spiral plays out week after week, season after season, across every sport. And it almost never works.

But hold on a moment! These players are doing what they've always dreamed of doing. They're elite athletes. They've worked every day since they were kids to get here. They spend their entire life preparing to play these games. They give everything. Their families make great sacrifices to support the demands of their career. They put their bodies through immense pain and suffering so they can go out there and perform on the biggest stage.

It just doesn't make sense to say that a player who is minutes away from everything they've ever dreamed of would simply give up, or be uninterested in winning, or develop a sudden attitude problem. It doesn't stack up!

**PLAYERS ARE NOT
INTENTIONALLY CHECKING
OUT DUE TO THEIR
PERSONALITY OR ATTITUDE.**

Yes, there are rare cases of genuine disengagement – players who truly don't care, who are counting down the days to retirement, or who have checked out mentally from the sport altogether. But these are the exception, not the rule.

And here's the critical point: treating every mental lapse as an attitude problem ensures you'll never develop the skills to address the real issue.

You'll keep cutting players who could have been coached, threatening athletes who needed tools – and you'll keep losing games that didn't need to be lost.

MIND THE GAP

The problem is not that players have attitude problems or character flaws. The problem is that they are humans, not robots. And all human beings check out mentally under pressure. We can't change that about ourselves.

When we see players perform well in one quarter and poorly in the next, or well one week and then poorly the next, we know that they're mentally checking in and out, in and out, in and out. What is happening is that the player lacks the skills to reduce the time they are absent and increase the time they are present.

**SKILLS ISSUES ARE MUCH
EASIER TO RESOLVE
THAN ATTITUDE ISSUES.**

Players can be taught about where they go when their mind wanders, and how they can reset themselves and regain a high-performance state in seconds. When we apply this skill, athletes perform more consistently in games, and so increase their chances of winning.

If we understand and accept that it is a normal human experience to 'go there', then the skills we need to develop

are to quickly recognize when we are in that mental space, and to quickly reset and get ourselves back to a high-performance state.

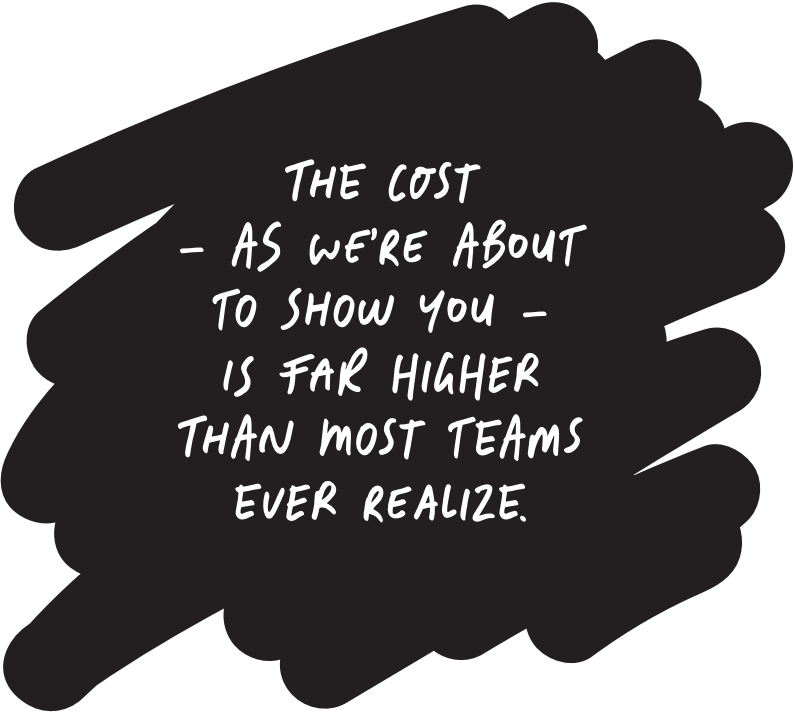
That is where a competitive advantage can be found. If a player gets faster at noticing when they've dropped into low performance and quicker at resetting from that state, then their game will improve and consistency will follow.

Developing this skill set means players have a significant point of difference. It empowers them to resolve issues in real time, mid-game. It's self-leadership.

Players will say to themselves: *I know where things are going wrong, and that's okay. I know how to get back to a great place again.*

The coach won't need to scream down the phone or put their head in their hands.

Given that these skills are trainable, how much does it cost a team when players go missing in action? And more importantly – how much of a competitive advantage could you gain if your players could reset in seconds rather than minutes, or recover from setbacks that leave your competitors checked out for entire games?



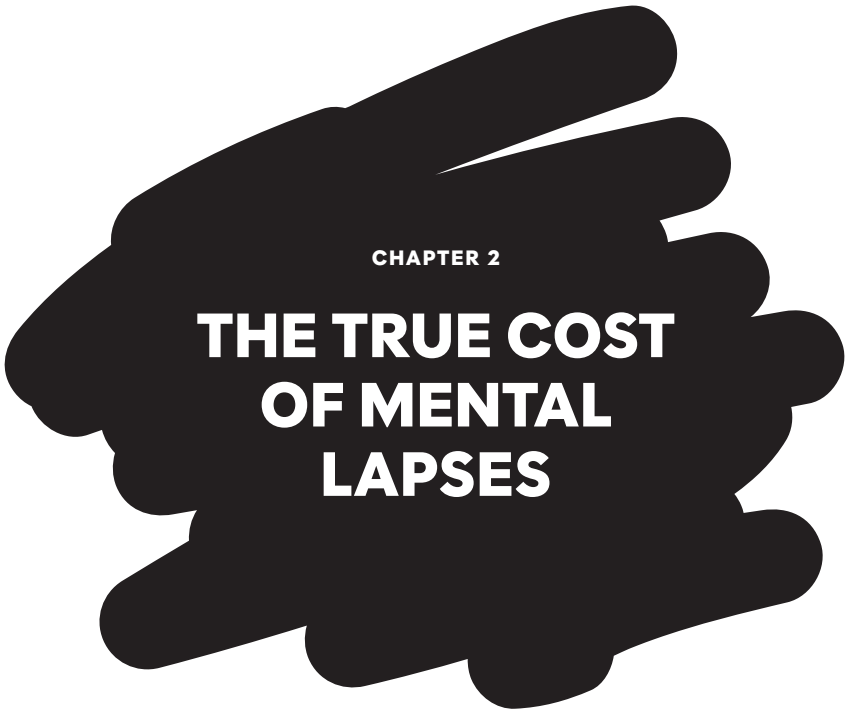
THE COST
- AS WE'RE ABOUT
TO SHOW YOU -
IS FAR HIGHER
THAN MOST TEAMS
EVER REALIZE.

"The feeling in
the shed is like
no-man's land...

There's a
sort of desolate
decay and
- I don't want to
dramatise it -
the smell of death."

Anton Oliver

New Zealand All Black



CHAPTER 2

**THE TRUE COST
OF MENTAL
LAPSES**

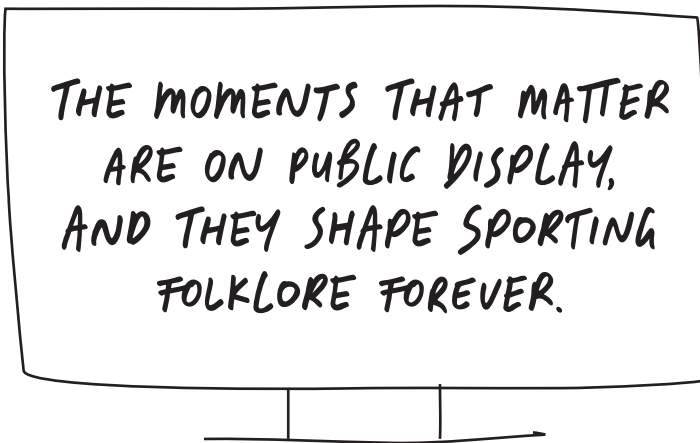
These words speak of the extreme pain of falling short. With the weight of a nation on their shoulders, the most dominant rugby team in the world choked in the quarterfinals. The All Blacks had been bundled out of the 2007 World Cup by the French.

Although mental lapses happen in every industry, especially in circumstances of change and pressure, they're more obvious in sport, and more visceral. Every moment an athlete is checked out in a game can mean the difference between success and failure. Lapses can have an extremely high cost – emotionally, professionally and financially.

The moments that matter are on public display, and they shape sporting folklore forever. Everybody can see what's happening, moment by moment, on national TV. Athletes hope they don't end up on a highlights reel of infamous moments, being played over and over again.

Here's a thought experiment that athletes might consider. If you have \$86,400 and somebody steals \$10 from you, how much time are you going to devote to getting it back? Not much, right? Well, there are 86,400 seconds in a day. If you go missing for ten seconds, but those ten seconds end up being the moments in which the game is lost, you might well spend the rest of your life wishing you could get them back.

But you know what? Even though lapses at crucial moments are so evident and so painful, in our experience their real cost is not fully understood. If it was, more clubs would do something about it. They would be focused on searching for an answer, not just falling back on old solutions which yield little to no results, like harder physical training.



It's not an accusation. We know how dedicated coaches and players are to their craft. What we mean is this: before you take action on what we're describing in this book, you need to fully appreciate just how much your inaction, or your wrong actions, is costing you.

Let us prove to you that every minute of time you dedicate to Mental Performance Training, and every dollar you spend, is worth it.

THE DOLLAR COST

Can we cost the impact of going missing? Perhaps you think the answer is no. But we have found that, in sport, the cost of missing moments can be calculated in dollar terms.

Professional sport is big business. If you're a coach, you're in charge of a multi-million-dollar investment that turns out every weekend to perform on the field. Now, if they're only there for 75 per cent of the game, and for 25 per cent of the time they're checked out, what's the actual labor cost of that?

Think about it another way. If you could bring the time your players are checked out down to 20 per cent, you could make back millions of dollars of investment. And if you can bring it down to 15 per cent, then you'll start delivering the kind of return on investment that makes you a sought-after coach.

Let's break it down a bit further.

SALARIES

The salary cap for the 2025 NFL season is \$279.2 million USD, with top quarterbacks like Dak Prescott earning \$60 million annually. In the NBA, the 2025-26 salary cap is \$140.6 million USD, distributed among just 15 players per team, making the average NBA player salary \$11.91 million. The 2025 MLB season has no salary cap, with stars like Shohei Ohtani earning \$70 million annually under his record \$700 million contract.

A 25 per cent checkout is going to cost you around \$69.8 million in NFL players who are underperforming at best, or

collapsing the team at worst. For an NBA team, that’s around \$35 million. For a high-spending MLB team with a \$300 million payroll, that’s \$75 million in wasted investment.

In global sports, the numbers are exponentially higher. The 100 highest-paid athletes in 2024 earned a collective \$5.2 billion USD, with individual superstars like Cristiano Ronaldo earning \$260 million annually.

SPORT	AVERAGE ANNUAL SALARY USD	HIGHEST-PAID ATHLETE
Formula One Racing (F1)	\$20m	\$76m (Max Verstappen)
National Basketball Association (NBA)	\$9.5m	\$51.9m (Stephen Curry)
Major League Baseball (MLB)	\$4.8m	\$70m (Shohei Ohtani)
English Premier League (EPL)	\$4.1m	\$80m (Erling Haaland)
La Liga (Spanish football)	\$3.8m	\$95m (Kylian Mbappé)
National Hockey League (NHL)	\$3.5m	\$15.5m (Nathan MacKinnon)
National Football League (NFL)	\$3.2m	\$55m (Dak Prescott)
Serie A (Italian football)	\$2.1m	\$45m (Victor Osimhen)
Indian Premier League (IPL)	\$1.5m	\$4.2M (MS Dhoni)
Ligue 1 (French football)	\$1.4m	\$48m (Ousmane Dembélé)
Major League Soccer (MLS)	\$0.5m	\$15m (Lorenzo Insigne)
Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC)	\$0.3m	\$6.3m (Jon Jones)
ATP World Tour (tennis)	\$0.2m	\$52.3m (Jannik Sinner)
Boxing	\$0.05m	\$137m (Canelo Alvarez)

What we are talking about is tens of millions of dollars going missing in critical moments. We know that players can often go missing for even longer – perhaps you'll even lose them for the entire game. Or a week. As a coach, your job is to get the best out of your players, and you simply can't win if they aren't there.

Let's take this a step further. If players can have checked out for 25 per cent of a game, and we know many coaches don't know how to coach that 25 per cent, what's the financial cost of a coach who is only able to coach for 75 per cent of the game?

SPONSORSHIP

Sponsors want winners. The salaries that athletes earn pale in comparison to the sponsorship and endorsement deals that the top performers garner.

In 2024, Stephen Curry earned \$55.8 million in salary but received \$100 million from endorsement contracts and business ventures. LeBron James earned \$52.6 million in salary but made \$80 million from his commercial partners. Kevin Durant added \$45 million in off-court earnings to his NBA salary.

The NBA's top 10 endorsement earners made a combined \$386 million off the court in 2024. All up, the top 100 highest-paid athletes globally collected more than \$2 billion in sponsor deals in 2024.

Checking out can take a real toll on a player's sponsorship

earnings. When performance suffers, so do endorsement opportunities. Athletes who develop reputations for inconsistency or mental lapses often find themselves losing lucrative deals or struggling to secure new ones.

OLD SOLUTIONS ARE COSTLY

The old solution is to measure every dimension of physical capability, and crunch performance data and analytics from all areas of the game, but these techniques don't tell us anything about the mental aspect of poor performance. It's a solution that reveals the symptoms but says nothing about their cause.

In the heat of a losing streak, it's natural for coaches to reach for what they know and trust – harder physical preparation, tighter tactical drilling, increased intensity. These instincts come from genuine experience and dedication to winning. We've seen coaches bunker down with their team in this way for a week or two after things go wrong. They lock everyone else out and ramp up the pressure and the physical training. They put the fear into the players. Sometimes this works for a game – the intensity lifts everyone temporarily. But when the root cause sits in the mind rather than the body, these responses can inadvertently compound the problem, and the collapse returns.

Fear can motivate temporarily, but it's never a sustainable solution. We humans are addicted to the carrot and stick approach. External motivators are only ever short-lived. *"I'm*

going to do it,' we tell ourselves. 'I'm going to change. I'm going to be better.' The change may last for a week, or a month or a day, but ultimately we revert to our subconscious patterning – to our hardwired habits and behaviors.

By diagnosing the actual problem, we remove wasted energy and investment that comes with targeting the problem in the wrong way. Critically, we reduce the costs associated with ineffective coaching interventions that harm relationships, kill the joy of the game through punishment, and negatively impact players' mental resilience and self-confidence.

SLOW SOLUTIONS ARE COSTLY

The issue here is speed. A slow solution to mental lapses is a costly one. Every moment a player is absent, the cost compounds. The question is: how rapidly can we reset the mind? The difference between a slow solution to mentally checking out and a rapid reset is immense.

SO AT BEST THE
OLD SOLUTION IS SLOW;
 AT WORST,
IT'S NO SOLUTION AT ALL.

A solution is slow if the player isn't aware that they're in a low-performance mind state, or if they become aware of their low-performance state but don't know how to get out of it. If they have been given wrong techniques, such as 'run it out and eventually it'll shift', then the solution is also slow. The coach is screaming at them, unhappy with their performance but unable to do anything apart from taking them off the field. It's all way too slow, and therefore ineffective.

More often than not, the old solutions make the problem worse - to the point that a player who, with the right Mental Performance Training, may have gone missing only momentarily now goes missing for longer periods, even the entire game. Indeed, a mental issue can spiral and see a player go missing for weeks, inevitably leading to them getting dropped. The 'solution' becomes destructive and degenerative, offering a negative return on investment.

NO SOLUTIONS ARE COSTLY

*'Why we came up short today,
I'm not sure. Sometimes you
never know.'*

**- Eddie Jones, Head Coach of the
England national rugby team**

Speaking after his team's shock loss to South Africa in the 2019 Rugby World Cup final, Eddie Jones perfectly captured the typical head-scratching over what went wrong.

The tangible financial costs of no solution are astonishing, but there are other costs too. There's a reputational cost, for instance, with blame being heaped on coaches and players for not living up to expectations, for performing inconsistently or for checking out. There are confidence costs that can plague a career. There are relationship costs between coaches and players, or between teammates. The list goes on.

No one denies that mental lapses are costly, although we remain surprised at how little this is talked about. But there is a sense that the costs of mental lapses are inevitable. There can even be a sense that players' personalities are the reason for a lack of mental capability, and that they can't be controlled, rectified or aligned.

PLAYERS JUST GO AWOL.

In many sporting codes, coaches admit that this issue is getting worse, but they throw up their hands and say it's unavoidable collateral damage. There's a belief that this is 'just part of the game', and you can't do anything about it.

Thanks to the rise of neuroscience, mindfulness, and technology, elite athletes are now far more open to sharing what is happening in their mind from a performance perspective. They are willing to undertake Mental Performance Training as an aspect of performance training alongside physical, tactical and technical skills.

We now have a solution.

MENTAL PERFORMANCE TRAINING CREATES PROFIT

If you want to get a handle on the real costs to you and your team of mental lapses, run these numbers:

- How much did your sponsorship fall as a result of recent poor performances?
- How much is this affecting ticket sales and fan engagement?
- Have your merchandise sales fallen?
- When you analyze your player salaries, are you getting a positive return on investment?

What about the numbers if you're a player:

- Has your value dropped for your next contract?
- Are you no longer a player in demand?
- Have you lost sponsors, or are struggling to get deals?

HAVE YOU BEEN
RUNNING THESE NUMBERS?
IF NOT, WHY NOT?

+ ?
-
x

Mental Performance Training can shift the needle on all these by creating the one thing everyone is searching for in sport: consistent performance. Mental Performance Training reduces the number of mental lapses, and ensures that if they do occur, they are short-lived. In other words, players become more consistent in their performance from week to week. Rather than writing off a poor performance as an attitude problem, athletes learn to identify when they are in a particular mind state, and how to get out of it quickly.

Mental Performance Training reduces problems around the cost of player turnover and recruitment. We know that, in professional sport, one of the keys to success is being able to keep consistency in the playing list. So when we decide that there's something wrong with the players, or that the only solution is to get rid of one and recruit another, that's an ineffective option.

\$
WHETHER IN SPORT
OR IN BUSINESS, \$
\$ THE COSTS OF
CONSTANT TURNOVER
ARE VERY HIGH. \$

Rather than somebody giving an Al Pacino motivational speech, or motivating players through fear, we teach athletes and coaches how their mind impacts their performance, and we give them the appropriate mental tools and skills to get out of that state.

DOES IT ALL ADD UP?

We promised at the beginning of this chapter that we would look at the true cost of mental lapses. We've talked about the emotional, physical and financial costs. But does it ring true for you?

Everyone in the sporting world is looking to find a competitive advantage. Every player is trained using similar techniques. They're all pushed to achieve the same sort of physical performance levels. So the key variable that's open to innovation is the mind.

*'We're about to be able
to take control of the one
aspect of performance that
trumps all others.'*

Michael Gervais, high-performance
psychologist for the Seattle Seahawks

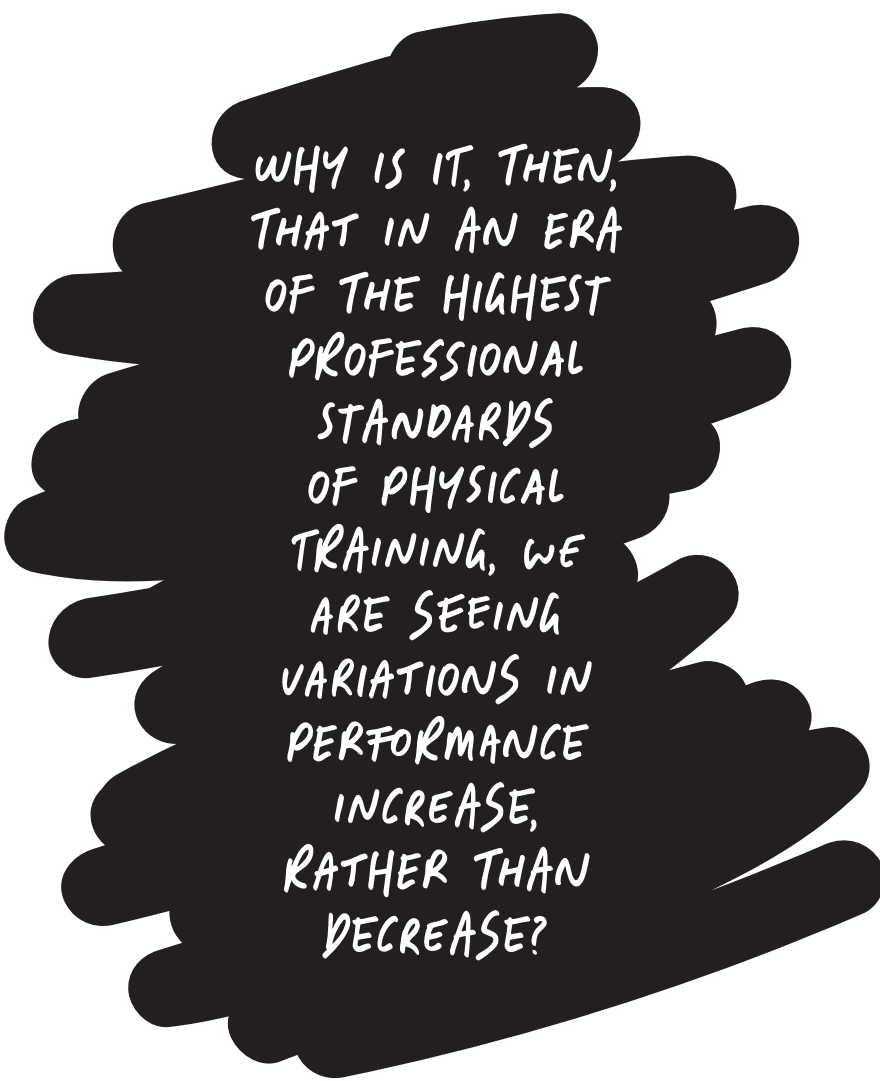
Mental Performance Training is part of this innovation opportunity. It's not the whole solution, but it's a massive opportunity for advantage. Not only will you remove hidden costs that plague your team, but you'll open the way forward to new levels of performance.

No athlete is perfect. The mind of every human is complex. There will always be moments where players mentally check out. The difference between you and your competitors is how far you can reduce the margin of absence, and how quickly you can recover when it strikes.

Although Mental Performance Training does not guarantee success, you can't win when players are mentally absent. Teams must maximize the amount of time in which players have the opportunity to influence the outcome. That's a financial imperative!

Perhaps you've also had a suspicion that performance fluctuations are getting worse. That, like some of the coaches we have worked with, you're never quite sure what you are going to get each night. That 'it was never like this back in my day'.

Well, we agree with you. Performance consistency does feel more variable these days.



WHY IS IT, THEN,
THAT IN AN ERA
OF THE HIGHEST
PROFESSIONAL
STANDARDS
OF PHYSICAL
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ARE SEEING
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PERFORMANCE
INCREASE,
RATHER THAN
DECREASE?

*"What's important
is your capacity
to control your
mind in any given
situation. If you
can't control your
mind, you're no
good to us."*

New Zealand All Blacks



CHAPTER 3

THE RISE OF PERFORMANCE FLUCTUATIONS

In February 2017, the Atlanta Falcons led Super Bowl LI by 25 points with 17 minutes remaining. They were 17 minutes away from their first championship in franchise history. Instead, they became the first team in Super Bowl history to blow a lead that large, losing 34-28 to the New England Patriots in overtime.

Two months later, the Golden State Warriors took a 3-1 lead in the NBA Finals against the Cleveland Cavaliers. No team in NBA Finals history had ever blown a 3-1 lead. The Warriors had just set the regular season record for wins and were overwhelming favorites. Yet they became the first team to lose the Finals after leading 3-1.

Six months after that, Paris Saint-Germain destroyed Barcelona 4-0 in the first leg of their Champions League tie. No team in Champions League history had ever overturned a four-goal first-leg deficit. With the greatest trio in football history – Messi, Suarez, and Neymar – having been publicly humiliated, Barcelona was written off in the return leg. Even as the clock clicked the 88th minute, the Spanish champions were still down 5-3 on aggregate. Yet something remarkable happened, they scored three goals in the final seven minutes to win 6-1 and advance 6-5 on aggregate.

Traditionally, it's been very hard to explain why performance fluctuations like this happen. *Perhaps we need to train the players harder? Perhaps they're soft? Maybe they aren't following instructions correctly? Are they complying fully with the program? Why aren't they showing enough heart? Don't they want it enough?* Explanations like these have proved largely inadequate.

AND YET PERFORMANCE
FLUCTUATIONS
ARE ON THE RISE.



THE DATA TELLS THE STORY

We decided to investigate this phenomenon systematically. What we discovered was revealing: across every major professional sport we analyzed, performance fluctuations aren't just increasing, in some they're exploding.

Let's start with the NFL. Using comprehensive data from 2000 to 2025, we tracked "blowout" games – defined as victories by 17 or more points. What we found challenges everything we thought we knew about competitive balance.

The NFL has experienced three distinct eras over the past 26 years:

Early 2000s Era (2000–2009): 26.1% blowouts

Average of 66.9 blowouts per season, despite fewer games

Parity Era (2010–2019): 24.7% blowouts

The NFL's salary cap and competitive balance measures seemed to be working

Modern Era (2020–2025): 25.0% blowouts

We're back to early 2000s levels of variance despite unprecedented parity

The most revealing finding? The 2021 season saw 75 blowouts, the highest number in over two decades. This wasn't an anomaly. The 2024 season recorded 71 blowouts, the second-highest total in 26 years.

Think about that for a moment. Despite salary caps, draft systems, and sophisticated analytics designed to create competitive balance, we're seeing more extreme outcomes than ever. But the NFL is just the beginning. The NBA tells an even more dramatic story.

Basketball blowouts – games decided by 20 or more points – have followed a completely different pattern:

2000s Era: 16.7% blowouts

Traditional basketball with moderate scoring variance

2010s Era: 18.4% blowouts

Analytics revolution begins, slight increase in variance

2020s Era: 20.1% blowouts

Explosive surge in extreme outcomes

Here's the most eye-opening statistic: games decided by 50 or more points have more than doubled in the 2020s compared to the entire previous decade. There were only 8 such extreme blowouts in the 2010s. In just the first six years of the 2020s, there have been 19, including 5 in the 2023 season alone.

These kinds of variances shouldn't make any sense. NBA players are more athletic, skilled, and evenly matched than at any point in history. Yet we're seeing the most extreme scoring differentials ever recorded.

Major League Baseball shows a different pattern but the same conclusion. Using our 8+ run margin threshold for blowouts, we tracked 26 years of performance fluctuations and discovered the most consistent escalation across any sport:

Steroid Transition Era (2000–2009): 5.9% blowouts

Analytics Emergence Era (2010–2019): 6.7% blowouts

Three Outcomes Era (2020–2025): 8.0% blowouts

This represents a 35% increase over 26 years, the most sustained and consistent escalation we documented. Baseball's analytical revolution has created unprecedented variance in a sport traditionally known for close games.

Even in global football, the pattern holds. The Premier League has seen blowout games (3+ goal margins) increase by 48% from the "Big Four Era" to the modern era. Three of the four 9–0 victories in Premier League history have occurred since 2019, with Southampton suffering two of them.

DEFINING PERFORMANCE FLUCTUATIONS ACROSS SPORTS

To ensure consistency across our analysis, we established sport-specific "blowout" thresholds based on standard deviations from average winning margins:

- **NFL:** 17+ point margin (approximately 2.5 standard deviations above average)
- **NBA:** 20+ point margin (roughly 1.5 standard deviations, accounting for higher-scoring nature)

- **Premier League:** 3+ goal margin (significant in low-scoring sport, ~2 standard deviations)
- **MLB:** 8+ run margin (substantial differential in baseball context, ~2.2 standard deviations)

These thresholds capture games where one team achieved decisive, systematic dominance rather than narrow victories that could be attributed to single plays or moments.

CROSS-SPORT PERFORMANCE FLUCTUATION ANALYSIS (2000-2025)

SPORT	BLOWOUT DEFINITION	EARLY ERA	MODERN ERA	OVERALL TREND
NFL	17+ points	26.1% (2000-2009)	25.0% (2020-2025)	U-Shaped Return
NBA	20+ points	16.7% (2000-2009)	20.1% (2020-2025)	Explosive Surge
Premier League	3+ goals	8.6% (2000-2009)	12.6% (2020-2025)	Steady Escalation
MLB	8+ runs	5.9% (2000-2009)	8.0% (2020-2025)	Most Consistent Rise

Spectators commonly ask:

‘Why does my team play well one week and then get completely wiped off the field the next week? Why does my favorite player perform amazingly one week and then suck the next?’

The data now provides a clear answer: performance fluctuations are increasing across every major sport, reaching levels not seen in decades or, in some cases, ever recorded.

But here's the most revealing finding of all: when we analyzed playoff pressure versus regular season performance, we discovered the ultimate validation of mental training necessity.

THE PLAYOFF PRESSURE AMPLIFIER

NFL playoffs provide perfect laboratory conditions for studying mental pressure because everything else remains identical. Same players, same preparation, same physical conditioning, same game plans. The biggest variable that changes is mental pressure.

Modern Era Playoff Amplification: 1.53x Regular season blowout rate: 21.8% Playoff blowout rate: 33.3%

Playoff games in the modern era show a 53% higher blowout rate than regular season games. This is the highest amplification factor we've recorded in 26 years of data.

Think about what this means. When physical preparation, talent, and strategy are held constant, mental pressure alone creates a 53% increase in extreme outcomes. This is powerful evidence that mental pressure plays a far greater role in performance outcomes than most teams acknowledge.

THE FALL OF FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS

The increase in performance fluctuations becomes even more revealing when we examine fundamental skills across multiple sports, those isolated moments where athletes face minimal defensive pressure but maximum mental pressure.

In Major League Baseball, batting averages have collapsed from around .270 in the 1990s-2000s to .239 in 2025, approaching levels not seen since 1968's "Year of the Pitcher." This occurs despite unprecedented access to video analysis, biomechanical assessment, and hitting technology.

Basketball shows a similar pattern in high-pressure situations. While overall free throw percentages have remained steady, research reveals increased variation in clutch situations, with both star and non-star players showing decreased accuracy "by a factor of at least 0.5%" from the 2000s to 2010s under extreme pressure.

Soccer penalties - football's most isolated fundamental skill - demonstrate the clearest pressure effects. While regular penalty conversion rates hover around 75-80%, rates drop significantly in highest-stakes situations like Champions League finals, with research showing "clear evidence of a decrease in successful penalty kicks when the pressure is high and anxiety crops up."

THE EXCEPTION THAT PROVES THE RULE

Only in one area have fundamental skills improved: NFL field goal kicking, where accuracy has increased 12-40 percentage points across all distances since 1999. Kickers are the ultimate pressure performers – one player, one moment, binary outcome. It's no coincidence that this is also the position where mental training, visualization, and pre-kick routines have become most embedded in the culture of preparation.

Think about what this reveals. Across baseball, basketball, and soccer, fundamental skill execution under pressure is becoming more variable despite better physical preparation.

Four sports, same pattern: the body is more prepared than ever, but performance under pressure is getting worse – except where the mind has been trained alongside it.

THE BODY IS NOT THE ANSWER

We know that today's athletes are physically exceptional. Strength and conditioning programs across elite sport have reached extraordinary levels of sophistication – the quality of physical preparation has never been higher. Collectively, we've been exploring how to best train the body for a long time now, and the gains have been remarkable. But there is growing consensus that the biggest remaining marginal gains in physical preparation are just that – marginal.

We also know that, at the elite level, every player is talented and highly skilled; you wouldn't be there if you didn't have talent and skills. The elite level is the cream of the crop.

So if players are stronger, faster, more skilled, and better prepared than ever before, why are we seeing unprecedented performance fluctuations? What's missing? What separates the best from the rest?

There's a truism coaches and athletes use which says that:



90 PER CENT OF
WHAT HAPPENS ON THE
FIELD, HAPPENS ABOVE
THE SHOULDERS.

They've said this for decades, and athletes know it's true. It seems obvious. People always say that, but they do not do anything about it! If we believe this is right, then the issue is more likely that we don't know what to do about it.

How do we train it?

If the answer were obvious, everyone would be doing it. But there is a way.

A MODEL OF CONSISTENCY

LeBron James is arguably the best basketball player in the world. He is an incredibly consistent athlete, and has been to eight straight NBA Finals. Regardless of how his team is performing or what the result of the game is, you know what you're going to get out of him. His coach does not have to wonder if LeBron will be on tonight or not.

We also know that LeBron James has trained his mind over the years. If there's consistency internally, he knows, there will be consistency externally. In LeBron's own words:

*"The mental side
of the game is
about 80 per cent"*

LeBron reportedly invests around \$1.5 million USD per year on conditioning his mind and body. He has spoken about the power of mental training, and how he has used it to improve aspects of his game. He used to be a weak three-point shooter, for instance, but he practiced a range of mental performance

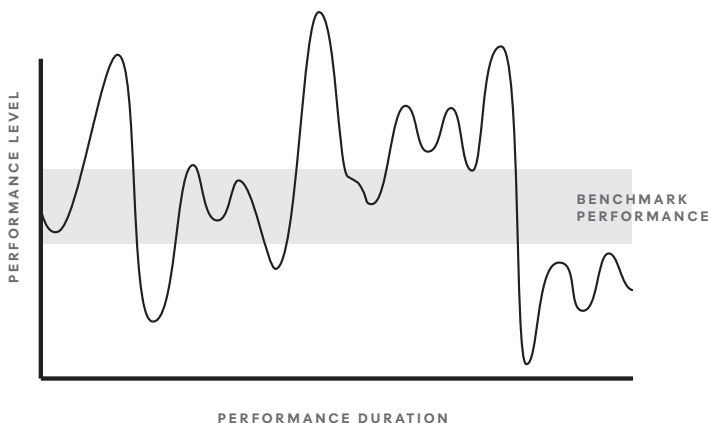
techniques that helped him create a consistent shot.

The following comment from an Olympic athlete on her gold-medal performance illustrates that often you don't even need your best performance to win; all you need is to be consistent when those around cannot. *'This may come as a bit of a shock but I didn't have a great competition in Sydney. I was consistent . . . but it wasn't a great performance.'*

Consistency is not a sexy word, and many players would probably prefer to be known as heroes or stars, but it's actually the word that great careers are built upon. Becoming elite is one thing, but can you stay there, year after year?

Coaches want consistency. They would be happier with a 7 out of 10 performance every week, rather than a 10 one week and a 4 the next. They know that if everyone performs at 7 out of 10, that will be enough to win most games.

Why? Because every other team struggles with consistency as well.



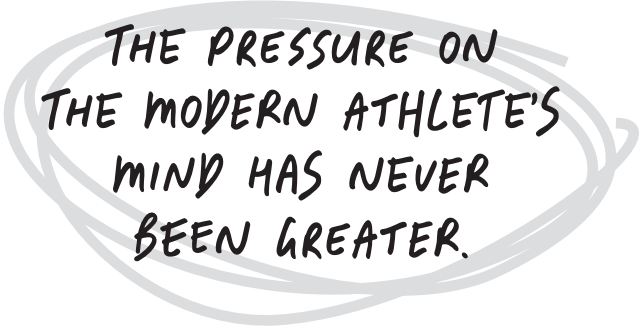
WHY PERFORMANCE FLUCTUATIONS ARE INCREASING

Our comprehensive analysis across four major sports reveals five key factors amplifying momentum swings in the modern era:

1. The Social Media Cascade

Thirty years ago, players didn't have to face social media, online trolling, or the hyper-critical commentary that we have now. A mistake during a game was discussed by commentators and perhaps mentioned in the next day's newspaper. Now, every play is dissected by millions of people in real-time.

Athletes report that knowing their performance is being critiqued by global audiences creates a psychological avalanche effect. What would have been a single mistake recoverable within minutes now becomes a mental cascade that can destroy an entire performance.



THE PRESSURE ON
THE MODERN ATHLETE'S
MIND HAS NEVER
BEEN GREATER.

2. Analytics Paralysis

Modern athletes and coaches have access to more performance data than at any point in history. Preparation has never been more informed. But there's a paradox: information that's invaluable in the meeting room can become noise on the field.

As one head coach told us: "I make my worst decisions when I'm watching the data and my best decisions when I just watch the flow of the game."

Consider a quarterback facing third-and-seven in a playoff game. Thirty years ago, he read the defense and threw. Now, his mind is carrying pre-snap analytics, tendency data, situational conversion rates, and the knowledge that every decision will be graded by an algorithm after the game. Under pressure, a mind carrying too much data can freeze – and a split-second hesitation at this level is the difference between a first down and a punt.

Instead of enhancing performance, over-analysis creates decision-making delays that compound under pressure.

3. Financial Pressure Escalation

Our salary analysis reveals exponential increases in financial stakes across all major sports. Average NFL salaries have increased 300% since 2000. NBA contracts have reached unprecedented levels. With massive contracts comes performance anxiety on a scale never before experienced.

When tens of millions of dollars are riding on every performance, the psychological weight can be overwhelming. Higher financial stakes create bigger psychological swings.

4. Shortened Attention Spans

The digital age has fundamentally altered how minds process information. We receive the equivalent of 174 newspapers' worth of information per day now, compared to 40 newspapers' worth in 1986 – nearly five times more.

The effects of this informational surge are easy to imagine: a busy, highly distracted mind that struggles to focus, that is filled with worries and anxious about the future. Modern athletes struggle with sustained concentration in ways previous generations never experienced.

Mental lapses now compound faster than in previous eras because the baseline attention capacity has been eroded by constant digital stimulation.

5. Global Scrutiny Amplification

Twenty-four-seven coverage means every moment is magnified. Athletes know that their performance is being watched and analyzed by global audiences in ways that would have been unimaginable to previous generations.

Our data shows that playoff blowouts – where scrutiny is most intense – have the highest amplification factors in the modern era. The knowledge of constant observation creates performance anxiety that directly contributes to extreme outcomes.

These five factors combine to create what we call “momentum amplification” – where mental lapses cascade into systematic breakdowns faster and more severely than ever before.

A DIFFERENT LENS ON THE DATA

Sports psychology research has often focused on individual "hot hand" phenomena – whether players could maintain streakiness in repetitive tasks like shooting. A comprehensive meta-analysis of 22 studies spanning 27 years found inconclusive results, with correlation values ranging from -1 to $.92$.

But these studies missed the bigger picture. They were examining individual streakiness over short sequences rather than team-level momentum cascades across entire games and seasons.

Our approach was simply to look at the data differently. Every analytics department in elite sport has access to this kind of data – we just asked a different question. Instead of studying whether a basketball player makes the next shot after making several in a row, we examined how entire teams perform under systematic pressure across thousands of games over decades. What if the patterns we're seeing aren't about physical preparation, tactics, or talent – what if they're about the mind?

The patterns are clear and consistent across every sport we examined. While traditional "hot hand" research focused on individual streakiness – a different question entirely – our team-level momentum analysis reveals patterns worth paying close attention to across major sports.

MORE PHYSICAL ABILITY, LESS MENTAL RESILIENCE

As we've seen, players now have more performance development support than ever before. Their physical skills and strength are dramatically better than what players had 30 years ago, but their mental skills aren't necessarily as strong. These factors combine to increase the likelihood of performance fluctuations.

Those who were young 30 years ago developed a certain resilience, grit and toughness. That era believed in the 'school of hard knocks' approach to building resilience.

*LIFE WAS HARDER,
BUT SPORT WAS EASIER.
NOW LIFE IS EASIER,
BUT SPORT IS HARDER.*

While we've seen the physical evolution of the athlete, the equivalent mental performance evolution has not happened.

Why are we seeing this data? The new generation of players are growing up in a different era. An environment of intense scrutiny, tracking their every movement, analyzed from every angle. There is an expectation for them to be perfect, and they certainly hear about it when they're not.

We need to acknowledge that the world is very different now. We need to grow mental toughness through new approaches, not by falling back on the old methods.

A NEW-SCHOOL APPROACH

*'We need to not just pay
lip service to the mental side,
we need to do some work
to addressing the elephant
in the room.'*

Richie McCaw,
captain of the All Blacks, 2007

These were Richie McCaw's words after the New Zealand All Blacks were shockingly knocked out of the 2007 Rugby World Cup by France. Until that time, they were arguably the best team in the world, and had been for a long time. They entered the World Cup completely dominant, and with all the expectation of bringing it home to New Zealand for the first time in the modern era. But with the weight of the nation on their shoulders, they choked in the quarterfinal to a French team to which no one had given a hope.

The All Blacks were the strongest team in the world, the most skilful, the best coached and had the best tactics. Yet on that day they went missing in action.

LACK OF MENTAL SKILL IS A KEY FACTOR IN PERFORMANCE FLUCTUATIONS.

So what did the All Blacks do? Over the next decade, they invested significant dollars and time into Mental Performance Training. What did they get for their investment?

- The All Blacks were World Cup winners in 2011 and 2015.
- They took home 13 consecutive Bledisloe Cups, and were unbeaten between 2007 and 2019.
- They became the first nation to achieve a 100 per cent winning record in a calendar year, which they accomplished in 2013.
- They achieved their joint longest winning streak of 18 Test victories in 2015–16.
- They had their most consecutive Test wins at home, a 47-match winning streak between 2009 and 2017.
- They achieved the highest winning percentage of any sporting team in any code globally, making them the world's most consistent team.

The All Blacks are an example of the new-school approach in action. Theirs is a mental skills-based approach. They knew they came up short in 2007 because they had collapsed mentally. They recognized that the mental pressures on modern players are significantly higher than they've ever been before. They took a bold step to change their approach to embrace Mental Performance Training, and they have reaped the rewards.

CROSS-SPORT EVIDENCE

Our analysis across four major professional sports reveals a consistent pattern: physical preparation alone isn't enough to prevent extreme outcomes under pressure.

NFL: Cyclical pattern shows physical parity alone isn't closing the gap in extreme outcomes

NBA: Explosive surge in blowouts coincides with rising pressure on the modern athlete

Premier League: Tactical evolution means mental lapses are punished faster and harder than ever

MLB: Analytical complexity has added a new cognitive load that compounds under pressure

Four sports, four distinct patterns, but one consistent conclusion: where physical, technical, and tactical preparation have been optimized, the mind has become the differentiator.

The team-level patterns we identified across all four sports

support what coaches have always sensed intuitively: teams that invest in mental preparation tend to control momentum and perform more consistently under pressure.

YOUR #1 COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Understanding the mind opens up a new field of competitive advantage. There's a short little window where Mental Performance Training is going to be a significant advantage.

So who else has been getting the advantage?

- The German national football team invested in Mental Performance Training and cognitive training technology through their partnership with SAP, contributing to their 2014 World Cup victory.
- In 2011 the Seattle Seahawks invested in systematic mental performance work, and three years later they won the Super Bowl.
- The Golden State Warriors made mindfulness one of their four core team values during a dynasty that included five straight NBA Finals appearances and three championships.
- European football clubs AC Milan and Chelsea FC created specialist 'mind rooms' in their clubs dedicated to training the minds of the players.
- The England football team used mental skills training to break their World Cup penalty shootout hoodoo in 2018.

- The Boston Red Sox, the Toronto Bluejays, Toronto FC and the Dallas Mavericks have all integrated mental skills training, cognitive science and mindfulness.

If all the other teams are focusing on physical performance and skills development, and you, as a coach, utilize Mental Performance Training as well, the size of the competitive advantage available to you is enormous.

'At the world-class level, where talent differences are marginal, we estimate that 90 percent of success for elite performers is mental.'

- Michael Gervais,
Performance Psychologist,
NFL, NBA, MLB, US Olympics

Simply put, Mental Performance Training reduces the fluctuations in an athlete's performance output. The data strongly supports this across every major sport we analyzed.

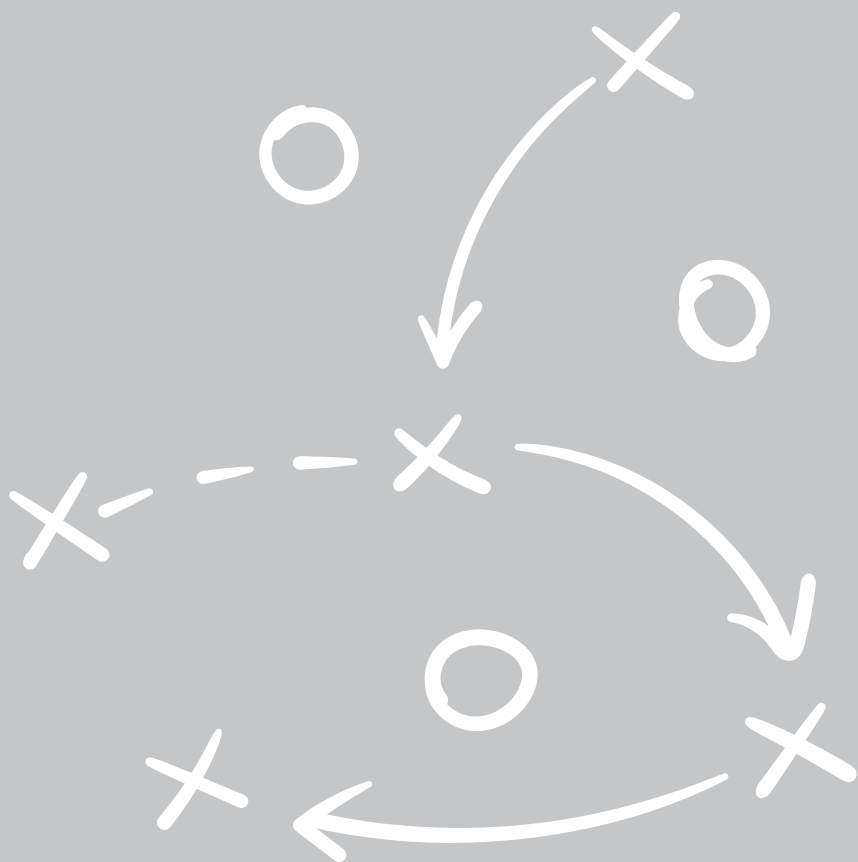
Our comprehensive 26-year analysis shows that while physical preparation has reached peak optimization, mental preparation remains largely untapped.

In an era where performance fluctuations are increasing to unprecedented levels, mental training isn't just beneficial – it's essential for any team or athlete serious about consistent championship-level performance. The direction is clear.

THE QUESTION ISN'T
WHETHER MENTAL
PERFORMANCE DETERMINES
OUTCOMES UNDER PRESSURE.

OUR ANALYSIS PROVES IT DOES.
THE QUESTION IS:

HOW WILL YOUR APPROACH
CHANGE WHEN YOU EMBRACE
THE REALITY THAT THE MIND
IS CONTROLLING THE SHOW?



2ND QUARTER



*'I think your
mind really
controls everything.'*

Michael Phelps

23x Olympic gold medalist



CHAPTER 4

**THE MIND
CONTROLS
THE BODY**

Eleven seconds into the 2014 Australian NRL Grand Final, forward Sam Burgess took a heavy collision that fractured his cheekbone in nine places. The club doctor examined him on the sideline and delivered the verdict: if Burgess continued playing, he risked permanent damage. He could lose his eye.

The logical choice – the safe choice – was to leave the field. His body was broken. The pain was immense.

What happened next is a story we'll tell later in this book. But what Burgess did in those 80 minutes – and why he was able to do it – is at the heart of everything you're about to read.

His body said "stop." His mind had other plans.

He's not alone.

THE MIND GIVES UP BEFORE THE BODY

On July 23, 1996, something impossible happened at the Atlanta Olympics.

American gymnast Kerri Strug had already injured her ankle on her first vault attempt. The team doctor examined her. Severe damage. She could barely walk. Her coach, Bela Karolyi, faced an impossible decision: the U.S. team needed one more strong vault to secure gold, but asking an injured athlete to perform could end her career.

Strug made the decision for him. She would vault again.

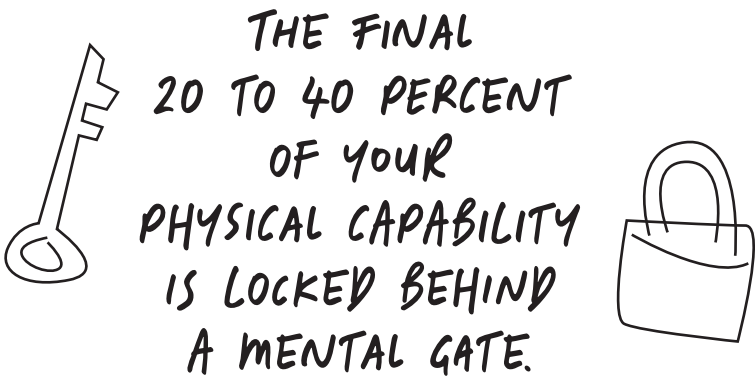
What happened next defied every physical limitation the

human body is supposed to have. Strug sprinted down the runway, launched herself into the air, rotated perfectly, and landed the vault on one foot. She held the landing long enough for the judges to register the score - 9.712 - then collapsed in agony.

The United States won gold. Strug's ankle was severely sprained. She never competed again.

Her body said "impossible." Her mind disagreed.

This isn't a story about heroism or sacrifice. It's a story about biology. Research in exercise science has demonstrated that when athletes believe they've reached their physical limits, they're typically accessing only 60 percent of their available muscle capacity. Elite athletes and professional weightlifters can push that to around 80 percent.



The Australian Institute of Sport conducted a controlled exercise on athletes' ability to hold two full 1-liter milk bottles with their hands stretched out wide. According to the study's

results, a participant would drop the bottles before they reached their actual physical muscular capacity. The mind gave into the pain, but the ability of the body had not been exhausted. Through training the mind, it then showed that athletes can improve their pain tolerance by up to 70 percent and access far more of their body's strength.

The mind controls access to the body's reserves. It decides when you're "done." And for most athletes, the mind gives up long before the body actually would.

Often we see players going through gruelling training sessions, and halfway through an exercise their performance indicators start dropping. Yet it's plainly obvious that their bodies aren't done yet – they're checking out in their mind. When they do a mental reset, more often than not their physical measures will immediately start to lift again.

The idea that the mind gives up before the body also translates onto the field every week. We see teams down by 10 points at half time acting like they've already lost – and more often than not they go on to lose the game. We see teams who have lost the game in their minds before they even run out onto the field. And we see teams who believe they can win right until the last second – and more often than not, they do.

David Goggins, retired Navy SEAL and ultramarathon runner, calls this the "40 percent rule." When your mind is screaming at you to stop, you've only used 40 percent of your actual capacity. The other 60 percent is available – if your mind will let you access it.

But here's what makes this even more interesting: the mind

doesn't just lock you out of your reserves when you're exhausted. It starts preparing to quit long before that.

In a 2015 study published in the *European Journal of Applied Physiology*, researchers examined when cyclists decided to reduce their power output during time trials. The athletes began conserving energy and slowing down well before they reached actual muscular failure. Their bodies were still capable. Their minds had already begun the process of quitting.

The mind calculates. It anticipates. It protects. And in doing so, it often stops you from ever discovering what your body is truly capable of.

'I've been in a poor physical shape many times in my career and I've had some of my best results. My best performances happened because my mind was in the right place. The mind is definitely stronger than the body.'

Kelly Slater, 11-time surfing World Champion

THE MIND CAN DRAIN THE BODY

We know that when the mind starts to worry, it will show up in the body. If a player has been worrying all week about the upcoming game, they often run out on the weekend and feel like they've got no legs. They're exhausted, they feel flat, and they have no idea where their energy went.

The human brain represents approximately 2 percent of total body weight. Yet even at rest, it consumes roughly 20 percent of the body's total energy. On a second-by-second basis, the human brain uses more energy at rest than a human thigh during a marathon. When the mind gets busy - worrying, overthinking, catastrophizing - it can burn through energy reserves faster than a high-intensity training session.

Too many athletes aren't aware that overthinking and worrying not only fatigues the mind, it also fatigues the body. Because it's happening inside the brain, somehow it is thought that it's isolated and can be compartmentalized from physical exertion. But it's the mind that is directing the show, not the muscles.

WHEREVER YOUR
ATTENTION GOES,
YOUR ENERGY FOLLOWS.



A landmark study examined what happens to the body when the mind is under sustained stress – what researchers call ‘allostatic load’, or the running tab your body keeps of every stressor you haven’t dealt with. The findings were clear: sustained mental stress creates measurable physical changes without moving a muscle:

- Heart rate increases 12-18 percent above baseline
- Blood pressure elevates significantly
- Blood vessels dilate and pump sugars and fats throughout the body
- Respiratory drive increases
- Sweat production rises
- Blood viscosity increases
- Inflammatory chemicals activate
- The brain’s attention centers switch into hypervigilance

All of this consumes energy. Real, measurable, physical energy.

Research on pre-competition anxiety published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* (2017) tracked elite athletes’ energy expenditure in the 48 hours before major competitions. Athletes reporting high anxiety showed:

- 12-18 percent higher resting heart rate
- 15-23 percent higher cortisol levels
- Significantly reduced Heart Rate Variability (indicating compromised recovery)
- Self-reported fatigue scores equivalent to completing a moderate training session

They hadn't done any physical work. Their minds had exhausted their bodies through worry alone.

We've seen this play out countless times with athletes. A player spends the entire week before a championship game worrying: *What if I make a mistake? What if the crowd turns on me? What if I let the team down? What if I blow my shot at the next level?*

By the time the game begins, they feel flat. Heavy. Exhausted. They have no idea why - they followed their physical preparation perfectly, they ate right, they slept their regulation hours.

But their mind has been running a marathon all week. And the body paid the price.

Research from the University of British Columbia tracked athletes' cortisol levels (the primary stress hormone) throughout competition seasons. Athletes who reported high levels of pre-competition anxiety showed elevated cortisol not just on game day, but for days leading up to performance. These sustained elevations correlated directly with decreased physical performance metrics - reduced power output, slower reaction times, and diminished endurance.

The mind doesn't just quit before the body. It actively drains the body's resources before the game even begins.

"Energy, not time, is the fundamental currency of high performance."

Jim Loehr

The best athletes understand this. They protect their mental energy as carefully as their physical energy. They know that where attention goes, energy follows. If you spend the week before a championship mentally replaying past failures or imagining future disasters, you arrive at game day with nothing left in the tank.

Conversely, athletes who train their minds to stay present, who practice redirecting worried thoughts back to what they can control in the moment, arrive at competition with full reserves. Their bandwidth is available for the challenge ahead.

This is why Mental Performance Training isn't a luxury. It's energy management.

THE MUSCLE MEMORY MYTH

We often hear the term "muscle memory," which implies that muscles have their own intelligence. They don't.

What we call muscle memory is actually the brain getting more efficient. When you practice free throws thousands of times, you're not training your muscles to 'remember' the shot. You're training your brain to fire signals faster and more reliably through well-worn neural pathways. The coating around those nerve fibres literally thickens with repetition – like upgrading from dial-up to broadband to fibre.

But here's the critical point: those signals still originate in the mind.

A study published in the *Journal of Neurophysiology* (2004) examined what happens in the brain during skilled movements. Using fMRI imaging, researchers tracked neural activity in athletes performing well-practiced skills. The athletes who performed most accurately showed the most efficient neural firing patterns – not in their muscles, but in their motor cortex and cerebellum.

The “muscle memory” that allows a basketball player to sink free throws or a quarterback to release the ball accurately under pressure isn’t in their limbs. It’s in their brain. The body is simply the messenger, carrying out instructions sent from command central.

When an athlete “forgets” how to perform a skill they’ve done a million times – when they suddenly can’t make the simple pass, or they fumble an easy catch – a coach assumes their muscles need to be ‘smartened up’. So they train them harder and make their bodies stronger, which perpetuates the myth that the body is at the center of the universe, when actually it’s the mind.

Their muscles haven’t forgotten anything. Their mind has sent different instructions.

THE BODY FOLLOWS THE MIND

We do everything twice: first in the mind, then in the body.

On July 17, 1994, 120 million people watched Roberto Baggio step up to take a penalty kick in the World Cup Final. Italy and

Brazil were locked 0-0 after extra time. Baggio - one of the world's best penalty takers - had the chance to keep Italy's hopes alive.

As he stood before the goal, and his eyes flicked around, you could almost see the thoughts that may have been going through his mind: *Don't miss. Don't kick left. Don't hit the post. Don't put it over the bar. Don't stuff it up.*

His body followed those instructions perfectly. He kicked it over the bar. Brazil won the World Cup. Watching from the stands or on television, we wonder, *How the hell did they miss that!?* You get what you focus on.

Later, Baggio would describe the moment: *"I still dream about that penalty kick. It's a nightmare that returns."*

What happened wasn't a technical failure. Baggio had made thousands of penalty kicks in his career. His body knew exactly what to do. But in that moment, his mind was filled with what he didn't want to happen. And the body simply followed the mind.



WE MAKE OR MISS
IN THE MIND, BEFORE
WE MAKE OR MISS
WITH THE BODY.

Research in sports psychology has demonstrated this phenomenon repeatedly. A 2011 study in the *Journal of Sports Sciences* examined penalty kick success rates in professional soccer. Players who reported focusing on “avoidance goals” (don’t miss, don’t hit the keeper, don’t let the team down) had significantly lower success rates than players who focused on “approach goals” (pick your spot, strike cleanly, trust your technique).

The body doesn’t distinguish between positive and negative instructions. It simply executes whatever the mind visualizes most clearly.

Tiger Woods understood this better than most. Early in his career, when he first experimented with mental rehearsal, he described an interesting problem: when he closed his eyes and imagined hitting a golf shot, he couldn’t control where the ball went in his visualization. It would fly into the trees, land in the water, end up in the rough. His mind couldn’t stabilize the image of success.

The result? His body followed those unstable mental images. His shots went exactly where his mind had pictured them going – into trouble.

IF THE MIND WOBBLES, THE BODY WOBBLES.

So Woods trained his mind. He practiced visualization until he could see, with perfect clarity, exactly where he wanted the ball to go. He could feel the strike, see the flight, anticipate

the landing, predict the roll. Only when the mental image was perfect would he execute the physical shot.

The transformation was remarkable. Woods became known not just for his physical skills but for his imagination and creativity. He could execute shots that other players thought impossible – because he'd already executed them perfectly in his mind.

"I never hit a shot, not even in practice, without having a very sharp, in-focus picture of it in my head," Woods has said.

The body follows the mind. It doesn't matter whether it's a free throw, a penalty kick, a ski run, a home run or a conversion – the body always follows the mind. If you can't control it in your head, you won't control it with your body.

THE MIND WORKS WHEN THE BODY CANNOT

In 2002, Australian aerial skier Alisa Camplin won Olympic gold. Four months before the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin, she re-injured her knee – the same knee she'd reconstructed after her 2002 victory. Full recovery would take six months. The Olympics were in four.

Camplin was physically incapacitated. She couldn't train her body. So she trained her mind.

Every day, for those four months, Camplin engaged in systematic mental rehearsal. She visualized skiing the Olympic course. She imagined the feeling of each movement,

the speed of descent, the execution of jumps, the precision of landings. In her mind, she practiced the way other athletes practiced on snow.

At the 2006 Olympics, without conventional physical preparation, Camplin won bronze.

"Mental rehearsal allowed me to maintain my skill level even when I couldn't physically train," she explained. "My mind kept my body ready."

This seems impossible. How can imagining an activity maintain physical performance?

The answer lies in how the brain processes physical and imagined movements. Research using functional MRI has demonstrated that when you visualize performing an action, your brain fires the same neural signals to the same muscles as if you were physically executing that action – just at a reduced intensity.

A landmark study published in the *Journal of Neurophysiology* (2004) examined two groups of participants whose wrists were immobilized in casts. One group was instructed to visualize exercising their wrist for 11 minutes per day, five days per week. The control group did nothing.

After one month, the casts were removed. The group that performed mental rehearsal had twice the muscle strength of the control group – despite never physically moving their wrists.

Let that sink in:

Mental practice alone doubled muscle strength.

Another study by Australian psychologist Alan Richardson examined basketball players practicing free throws. He divided players into three groups:

- **Group One:** Practiced physical free throws daily
- **Group Two:** Visualized shooting free throws daily (no physical practice)
- **Group Three:** No practice of any kind

After 30 days:

- Group One improved by 24 percent
- **Group Two improved by 23 percent**
- Group Three showed no improvement

The bodies of those in Group Two improved their skill level through the power of the mind alone.

If the body was in charge of performance, this would be impossible. But it's not. The mind is in charge. It always has been.

THE MIND GETS STUCK WHEN THE BODY IS FINE

Here's a problem most rehab programs don't address: an athlete's body can be physically healed while their mind is still trapped in the moment of injury.

The body has remarkable healing capabilities. Bones knit

back together. Muscles repair. Ligaments strengthen. Given time and proper treatment, the physical structure returns to pre-injury levels – sometimes even stronger.

But the mind doesn't heal on the same timeline.

We've worked with countless athletes whose scans show complete structural recovery – the hamstring is repaired, the bone is solid, the joint is stable – but they can't perform. They're tentative. They're protecting. They're bracing for pain that no longer exists.

Their body is ready to go. Their mind is still stuck back in the moment when everything went wrong.

This mental lag doesn't just slow return to play. It actively increases reinjury risk. When an athlete is mentally protecting an injury that's physically healed, they create compensatory movement patterns. They favor the "injured" side. They tense muscles unnecessarily. They alter their biomechanics in ways that load other structures incorrectly.

THE PHYSICAL INJURY
IS HEALED.
THE MENTAL INJURY
CREATES A NEW ONE.

Research published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* (2016) examined athletes returning from ACL reconstruction. The athletes who reported high levels of fear about reinjury

showed significantly altered movement patterns during cutting and landing tasks – even when their knees had full structural integrity. These altered patterns correlated with higher rates of secondary injury within 12 months.

The mind was protecting an injury that no longer existed. And in doing so, it created the conditions for a new injury.

One of the most powerful interventions we use is simple: change the language.

Everyone asks injured athletes the same question: *"How's your injury?"*

This question anchors the mind in the problem. It reinforces the identity of being injured. It keeps attention focused on what's broken rather than what's healing.

We train athletes to reframe the question – and more importantly, to reframe how they think about their own recovery. Instead of *"How's your injury?"* we ask *"How's your healing going?"*

The shift seems minor. The effect is profound.

"Injury" is passive. It's something that happened to you. It's a state of being broken.

"Healing" is active. It's something your body is doing. It's a process of becoming whole.

Where attention goes, energy follows. Athletes who focus on healing rather than injury show measurably faster recovery times. They return to training with more confidence. They report lower levels of fear about reinjury.

We've seen this repeatedly: a footballer with a torn hamstring who's been cleared to return but can't shake the mental hesitation.

We train them to redirect their focus from "protecting my hamstring" to "activating my healing mechanisms." Within days, the tentative movement patterns disappear.

A basketball player with a broken arm who's physically healed but mentally bracing for impact every time they go for a rebound. We teach them to visualize their arm as strong, as healed, as ready. The flinching stops.

The body was ready. The mind just needed to catch up.

Mental Performance Training doesn't just prepare athletes for competition. It mobilizes the mind to support the body's natural healing processes.

When the mind is focused on healing rather than injury, when it visualizes strength rather than fragility, when it trusts the body's recovery rather than protecting against phantom pain, recovery accelerates.

The body heals on a biological timeline. But the mind can either support that healing or work against it. Most rehab programs train the body back to function. They ignore the mind entirely.

Then they wonder why athletes keep getting reinjured.

THE MIND CAN **OVERRIDE** THE BODY

In moments of extreme crisis, the mind can unlock physical capabilities that shouldn't exist.

In 2006, Tom Boyle was driving in Tucson, Arizona, when he witnessed a cyclist get hit by a Chevrolet Camaro. The car's driver didn't stop – he kept driving with the cyclist pinned underneath the vehicle, being dragged along the pavement.

Boyle, a 5'7" man weighing around 165 pounds, ran after the car. When it finally stopped, he grabbed the frame and lifted the 3,000-pound vehicle high enough for bystanders to pull the cyclist free.

This phenomenon – often called "hysterical strength" – has been documented repeatedly. Parents lifting cars off trapped children. Individuals moving boulders they couldn't budge under normal circumstances. People performing physical feats that exceed their tested maximum capacity by 50–100 percent.

How is this possible?

Under normal conditions, the brain limits access to muscle capacity as a protection mechanism. Using 100 percent of muscle capacity can damage tissue, tear fibers, even break bones. So the mind enforces a governor – typically limiting access to 60–80 percent of maximum capacity.

But when the mind perceives a life-or-death situation, it can

temporarily remove that governor. The full capacity of the body becomes available.

Research published in *Sports Medicine* (2000) examined this phenomenon in controlled settings. When athletes were given a placebo they believed was a powerful performance enhancer, their power output increased by an average of 3.1 percent. When they were told they were competing against an opponent who was better than them (even when they weren't), they accessed deeper reserves and performed above their baseline.

The physical capacity was always there. The mind just wasn't granting access to it.

THE MIND IS THE LIMIT

*'The body will do
what the mind says.'*

Richie McCaw,
former captain of the All Blacks (2011–2015)

For decades, the 4-minute mile was considered a physical impossibility. Doctors published papers arguing that the human body simply wasn't built to run that fast for that distance. The heart would give out. The lungs would collapse. It couldn't be done.

On May 6, 1954, Roger Bannister ran a mile in 3 minutes, 59.4 seconds. Within three years, 16 other runners broke the 4-minute barrier.

The human body didn't suddenly evolve. Genetic capabilities didn't change. Training methods weren't revolutionized overnight.

What changed was belief.

For years, athletes' bodies were capable of running a sub-4-minute mile. Their minds just didn't believe it was possible. Once Bannister proved it could be done, the mental barrier shattered. Suddenly, what had been "impossible" became routine.

The same pattern played out in skateboarding. Tony Hawk landed the first-ever 900 in competition in 1999. Within a decade, it was a standard trick in the professional rotation. The barrier was never physical. It was mental.

This pattern repeats across every sport.

Perhaps the most dramatic example in recent sports history came on February 5, 2017, at Super Bowl LI in Houston.

The New England Patriots trailed the Atlanta Falcons 28-3 midway through the third quarter. No team in Super Bowl history had ever come back from more than a 10-point deficit. The Patriots needed to score 25 unanswered points in less than 18 minutes of game time.

The physical capability to execute those plays existed. Tom Brady's arm hadn't suddenly weakened. His receivers could

still run routes. His offensive line could still block. The body was capable.

But the mind had to believe the comeback was possible first.

Most teams – most minds – would have accepted defeat. The situation looked hopeless. Every statistical probability said it was over.

Brady did something different. He shifted his mental frame.

NFL Films captured him walking up and down the sideline, exhorting his teammates: "Let's go! Let's show some fight! Let's play harder! Harder! Tougher! Everything!"

Later, Brady would reveal what was happening in his mind during those moments. *"You can look at that situation and basically quit and say, 'We have no shot of winning,' or you can say, 'This is going to be an amazing comeback,'"* Brady explained. *"When we come back from this, this is going to be the defining moment in life, or a defining moment in a professional career. I think when you shift your mind and think that way, it becomes very empowering as opposed to very discouraging."*

Brady didn't just believe it was possible. He made his teammates believe it.

"We still had Tommy back there slinging that thing around so my confidence never went down," receiver Julian Edelman said afterward.

What happened next defied every statistical probability. The Patriots scored 31 consecutive points. Brady threw for a Super

Bowl-record 466 yards. They forced overtime. James White scored the winning touchdown.

Final score: Patriots 34, Falcons 28.

The greatest comeback in Super Bowl history.

The Patriots' bodies didn't suddenly become more capable in the second half. Their physical skills remained the same. What changed was their minds. Brady shifted the team's collective belief from "this is impossible" to "this is going to be an amazing story."

The body was always capable of executing those plays. The mind just had to catch up to what was possible.

Perhaps the most extreme example is Alex Honnold's free solo climb of El Capitan in Yosemite – 3,000 feet of vertical granite with no rope, no safety equipment, no backup plan. One mistake meant death.

Honnold's body was always capable of making those movements. He'd climbed El Capitan dozens of times with ropes. He knew every hold, every sequence, every precise placement of hands and feet.

The physical challenge wasn't the issue. The mental challenge was everything.

For years, Honnold trained his mind. He visualized every move. He rehearsed staying calm when his heart rate spiked. He practiced controlling his thoughts when fear crept in. He mentally prepared for the one climb where his mind couldn't afford to lag behind his body's capabilities.

On June 3, 2017, he completed the climb in 3 hours and 56 minutes.

"The physical part was almost irrelevant," Honnold said in interviews afterward. "It was all mental preparation."

The pattern is clear:

THE MIND OFTEN SETS LIMITS ON WHAT THE BODY CAN ACHIEVE.

These limits aren't based on physiology. They're based on belief, on imagination, on what we've seen done before.

When someone breaks through a supposed physical barrier, they don't just achieve something remarkable for themselves. They expand what everyone else believes is possible. The body was always capable. The mind just needed proof.

This has profound implications for performance. How many athletes are operating below their physical capacity not because their bodies can't do it, but because their minds haven't fully believed it's possible?

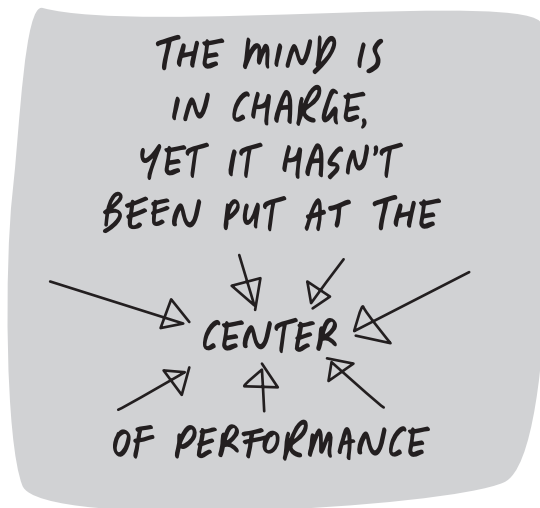
How many records remain unbroken not because of physical limitations, but because of mental ones?

The mind doesn't just control the body. Sometimes it holds the body back from what it's already capable of achieving.

PUT THE MIND FIRST

Despite everything we now know about how the mind controls performance, most sporting programs still put the body first.

If you want a strong player, you train their body. If you want a skilled player, you drill their technique. If you want a resilient player, you push them through physical adversity.



But here's what the research and real-world evidence tells us:

If you want a strong player, put the mind first. The mind controls access to the body's strength reserves. Without Mental Performance Training, athletes may never access their full physical capacity.

If you want a skilled player, put the mind first. Skill execution happens in the brain before it happens in the body. Mental rehearsal can improve performance almost as much as physical practice.

If you want a resilient player, put the mind first. Physical toughness alone doesn't prevent mental collapse under pressure. Resilience is a mental skill that must be trained directly.

By putting the mind first, you unlock more levers to influence performance. You can:

- Increase access to physical reserves
- Improve skill execution through mental clarity
- Reduce energy drain from anxiety and overthinking
- Enhance recovery through stress management
- Build genuine resilience that holds under pressure

The mind is in charge. If you want to perform at your best when it matters most, you must train the thing that's running the whole show.

Tom Brady, seven-time Super Bowl champion, put it simply:

"I feel the mind and body must work together. I believe just as strongly in the importance of mental fitness as I do about physical fitness."

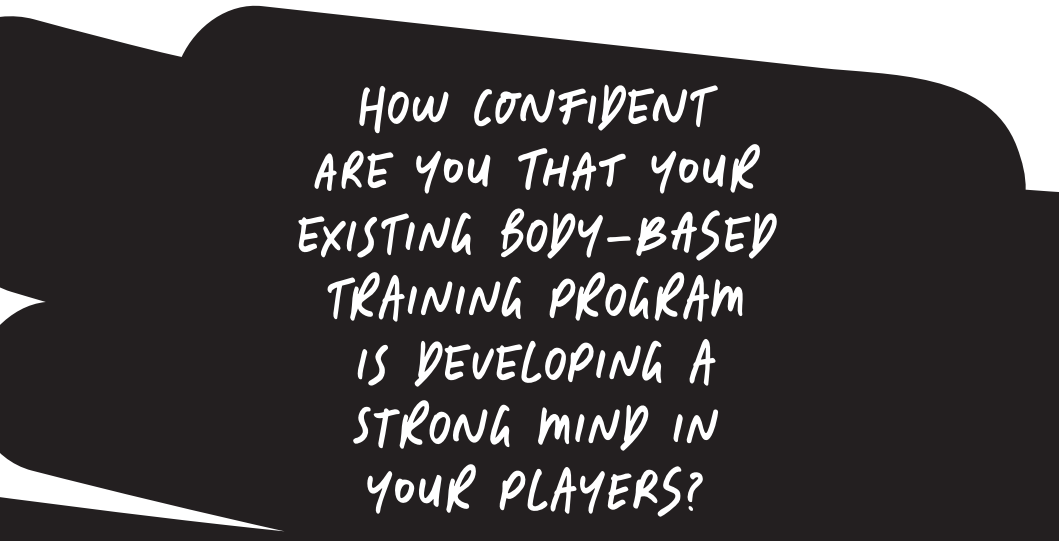
LeBron James, one of the most dominant and consistent athletes of his generation, invests in conditioning his mind and is explicit about the priority: **"The mental side of the game is about 80 percent."**

We often ask players a simple question: *what would happen if your mind was as trained as your body?*

Remember Sam Burgess, eleven seconds into the biggest game of his life, with a shattered cheekbone and a doctor telling him to stop? What he did next came from the power of his mind, not his body.

In the chapters ahead, you'll learn some of those tools. You'll discover how to recognize when your mind is losing control, and how to get it back in seconds. You'll understand why physical training alone will never be enough, and what you must do instead.

But before that - a question worth sitting with:



HOW CONFIDENT
ARE YOU THAT YOUR
EXISTING BODY-BASED
TRAINING PROGRAM
IS DEVELOPING A
STRONG MIND IN
YOUR PLAYERS?

*"Training harder
or being fitter
wouldn't have
made a difference
on that day"*

Richie McCaw

Captain of the All Blacks
(2001-2015)

CHAPTER 5

**TOUGHENING
THE BODY
DOESN'T MEAN
YOU TOUGHEN
THE MIND**

Richie McCaw had this honest reflection after the All Blacks' shock World Cup elimination by France in 2007. Further toughening the players' bodies wasn't going to help them. It was time to start training the mind.

Let's be clear from the outset: physical training matters. It builds the foundation that everything else sits on. Every championship team in history was physically prepared. The coaches and strength and conditioning professionals who dedicate their careers to building elite bodies deserve enormous respect for the work they do. The question this chapter asks isn't whether to train the body – it's whether training the body alone is enough to perform when the pressure is at its highest.

There's an age-old view that you make the mind stronger by pushing the body harder – that toughening the body will somehow toughen the mind. We've seen it in sport and in the military. We see it in the rise of CrossFit, UFC and gym culture. It's hardwired into our ethos that if you are put through physical duress, you will learn how to strengthen your mind.

But this isn't necessarily correct. Hard physical training might develop your willpower, determination or ability to fight when under adversity, but most of the conditions that plague the mind – self-criticism, low confidence, energy troughs, fogging out, anger, resistance, performance anxiety – are not directly influenced by working on the body.

There needs to be a balance. The level of energy we invest in the body needs to be balanced with the level of energy we invest in the mind. Historically, we've overinvested in the body and underinvested in the mind.

"If we all trained our minds as much as we train our muscles and physical body, I think we would achieve and maximize our potential."

- Novak Djokovic

TOUGHEN UP!

When clubs want to toughen their players' minds, they often turn to what feels most tangible: intense training, military-style physical duress, high-altitude environments, rugged mountain hikes. These experiences build genuine qualities – discipline, team cohesion, shared adversity, and a belief that you can push through barriers. There's real value in that. And yet the view still persists that if players can endure a physical ordeal, it will automatically make them tougher in the big moments when pressure, fear, self-doubt and anxiety emerge.

In our experience, it's true that working on the body creates pockets of mental resilience, but it has no effect on many other areas of mental resilience. Working on the body does build a belief among players that they can achieve things they didn't think they could. They learn to push through barriers.

However, such training still, fundamentally, doesn't help someone with a busy mind who suffers from negative thoughts. It doesn't help someone who's checked out, or who worries about their future all the time. It doesn't have any effect on those mind states.

BEYOND SPECIAL FORCES

Special forces preseason programs have become a rite of passage across elite sport. Navy SEALs, SAS commandos, elite military trainers pushing athletes through grueling physical challenges designed to “build mental toughness.” Teams invest heavily in them, and for good reason – these programs build real qualities.

Players carry logs through mud, endure cold water immersion, survive sleep deprivation exercises, and complete obstacle courses that test their physical limits. They learn to push through barriers they didn't think they could. They build bonds with teammates forged under shared adversity. The sessions are intense, the imagery is powerful, and players genuinely come out tougher.

And yet there's a gap.

The logic seems sound: if these programs forge soldiers who can handle extreme stress, surely they'll toughen up athletes for game day?

Teams invest heavily in these programs. Players carry logs through mud, endure cold water immersion, survive sleep deprivation exercises, complete obstacle courses that test their physical limits. The sessions are brutal, the imagery is powerful, and everyone feels tougher when it's over.

Six months later, when the season pressure hits, many of the same mental issues resurface:

- Players still choke in big moments
- Teams still collapse after mistakes
- Anxiety still interferes with performance
- Negative self-talk still dominates
- Focus still wavers under pressure

Why? Because carrying logs, cold water immersion, and sleep deprivation develop physical resilience and mental determination – valuable qualities. But they don't develop:

- The ability to rapidly reset after an error
- Skills to manage performance anxiety
- Techniques to control negative self-talk
- Capacity to maintain focus amid distractions
- Methods to regulate emotional intensity

Physical suffering teaches you to endure. Mental training teaches you to perform.

There's a crucial difference: Military training prepares soldiers to survive and complete missions under duress. Athletic performance requires executing complex skills with precision while under pressure. Different outcome, different training required.

The South Sydney Rabbitohs experienced this firsthand. In both 2012 and 2013, they invested in elite physical preparation, including special forces-style preseason camps that built genuine toughness and team resilience. The players were among the fittest and strongest in the competition. And

yet in both finals, the team collapsed when it mattered most. It wasn't that the physical preparation was wrong – it was that something was missing. The body was ready. The mind wasn't.

It was this insight that led their coach, Michael Maguire, to become one of the first in the NRL to invest in systematic Mental Performance Training.

THE PUNISHMENT PARADOX

High-intensity training sessions have their place. Pushing athletes beyond their comfort zone builds physical capacity, work ethic, and competitive edge. Coaches who run hard sessions do so because they care about winning and they know that elite performance demands elite preparation.

The paradox emerges when extreme physical intensity becomes the only response to mental performance issues. When a team collapses in a big moment and the response is to train them until they vomit the following week, something counterproductive can happen:

- Players become physically exhausted
- Decision-making quality deteriorates
- Skill execution degrades
- Injury risk increases
- Mental fatigue compounds physical fatigue

Then come game day, the same mental issues return – because the training addressed the body, not the mind. The athletes learned to associate intensity with suffering and degraded performance, but they were never trained to maintain mental clarity when physical intensity is high.

High-intensity physical training is valuable. And it needs to be complemented by training that teaches athletes to think clearly when the heat is on – otherwise you're creating fire everywhere, including where you need ice most.

BEYOND ALTITUDE

High-altitude training camps in places like Flagstaff, Arizona, or the Colorado Rockies are a legitimate and well-established part of elite physical preparation. Teams invest in them because the science is sound.

The physical benefits are real and measurable. Red blood cell production increases. VO2 max improves. Lactate threshold rises. Athletes return physically primed.

The physical benefits are genuine. And yet teams return from these camps and still experience the same mental collapses in crucial moments. Why?

Because VO2 max doesn't determine whether a player can handle a crucial penalty kick. Lactate threshold doesn't prevent choking. Red blood cell count doesn't stop negative self-talk.

**PHYSICAL PREPARATION
CREATES THE VEHICLE.
MENTAL TRAINING
CREATES THE DRIVER.**

You can have the most powerful engine in the world, but if the driver panics under pressure, loses focus at critical moments, or can't reset after mistakes, the vehicle won't perform when it matters most.

**WHAT PHYSICAL TRAINING
CREATES & WHAT IT DOESN'T**

Let's be clear about what physical training actually develops:

Physical training creates:

- Pain tolerance
- Work ethic and discipline
- Physical resilience
- Determination under adversity
- Belief in pushing through barriers
- Capacity for sustained effort

These are genuine, valuable outcomes. Physical training is and always will be a cornerstone of elite performance. No one is suggesting we abandon it. But there's a set of skills

that sit beyond what physical training can reach – skills that require direct training of the mind.

But physical training does not create:

- Emotional regulation under pressure
- Self-talk management skills
- Rapid mental reset capability
- Focus control amid distractions
- Anxiety management techniques

OR

- Confidence maintenance after mistakes
- Mental energy regulation
- Ability to calm a racing mind
- Skills to manage fear of failure
- Tools to handle critical thoughts

The distinction is critical.

You can run every mountain, carry every log, and endure every brutal session – and still have a mind that goes missing in action when the pressure comes.

THE FIRE AND ICE PRINCIPLE

"I can't have you calming them down too much. I need them to maintain a baseline level of violence all week, otherwise they'll have to get up for the game."

- High-performance manager

This comment from a high-performance manager reveals a concern we hear regularly – and it's not unreasonable. Many coaches and performance managers worry that calming the mind will soften the competitive edge. If you believe mental training is about relaxation, that fear makes perfect sense. His concern was legitimate: he didn't want to lose the intensity his players needed.

But this fear is based on a false equation. The goal of mental training isn't to create calm, passive athletes. It's to create athletes who can regulate between intensity and control at will.

**WE WANT FIRE
IN THE BELLY,
AND ICE IN THE HEAD.**

Fire in the belly =

Physical intensity, aggression, competitive drive, the warrior mentality that makes great athletes dangerous

Ice in the head =

Mental clarity, emotional regulation, precise decision-making, the ability to think clearly when your body is at war

Physical training creates the fire. Mental training creates the ice. You need both.

The problem isn't that athletes lack fire – most have too much of it, burning uncontrolled like a bushfire consuming everything in its path. What they lack is ice: the ability to think clearly when the fire is raging, to make good decisions when their body is primed for violence, to reset instantly when their emotions are ablaze.

The manager who worried about “baseline violence” misunderstood what was being lost. His players didn't need to maintain chronic aggression all week – that's a recipe for burnout, poor training quality, increased injuries, and mental exhaustion. What they needed was the ability to dial intensity up and down at will:

- Train with focus and precision during the week
- Bring maximum controlled aggression on game day
- Reset instantly when emotions spike
- Think clearly when physical intensity is highest

This is what separates elite from average. Average athletes have one setting: on or off, aggressive or passive. Elite athletes can regulate their state: intense yet controlled, aggressive yet precise, fired up yet clear-headed.

That's fire and ice in perfect balance. The body at war, the mind calm, clear, present. Maximum physical intensity with complete mental control.

You don't create this through running more mountains. You create it through systematic mental training.

NOT ALL HIGH PERFORMERS HAVE HIGH-PERFORMING MINDS

We've learned from profiling the minds of high-end athletes, military personnel, emergency services workers and corporate executives that some of the most elite performers in the world often don't have high-performing mental skills. We commonly find even the best have room to improve in their minds.



The fact that mental performance is invisible has led us to normalize low mental performance, because many other athletes don't have high-performance mental skills either. We know there's a gap that, if worked on, will raise athletic performance to a level not seen before. We may discover a person has critical self-talk, a fear of failure or an inability to focus, that they aren't able to control their energy, or can't reset from setbacks quickly under pressure. If any of these is the case, their performance is impaired.

By working on these conditions of the mind through mental skills training, players' performance rapidly shifts to a new level or becomes much more consistent. We often say to players, 'Imagine if we could get your mind anywhere near where you've got your body - what would you be capable of?'

'My leadership has gone to a new level... all the things I wanted to get out of this season I thought would all happen in a physical way, but it's been the mental side that's improved for me, and my football's got better from that.'

- Senior AFL player

A focus on Mental Performance Training affords a coach new territory in which the performance of their players can be lifted. It gives them a new space for the creation of leaps in performance, not just marginal gains. By creating higher-performing minds, you get greater consistency from week to week and game to game.

Players are physically trained within an inch of each other. It's getting harder to gain a competitive advantage through skill, strength or talent, so coaches need a new toolkit and a new language to talk to players and ask the crucial questions.

Your performance is varying.

What's going on out there?

You didn't suddenly forget how to play,

you didn't suddenly become weaker,

and you didn't suddenly forget the game plan.

What's happening in your mind?

How can I help?

Our Mind Performance Profile data – which we'll explore in detail later – supports that there's at least a 25 per cent skill gap in the minds of athletes that is currently untapped.

Why are we seeing this data?

The new generation of players are growing up in a different era. An environment of intense scrutiny, tracking their every movement, analyzed from every angle. There is an expectation for them to be perfect, and they certainly hear about it when they're not.

We need to acknowledge that the world is very different now. We need to grow mental toughness through new approaches, not by falling back on the old methods.

IF WE TRAINED PHYSICAL SKILLS THE WAY WE "TRAIN" MENTAL SKILLS

Imagine a strength coach who:

- Never measures baseline strength
- Doesn't track progressive overload or monitor improvements
- Gives the same program to every athlete regardless of individual needs
- Only intervenes when someone gets injured
- Believes strength "should just happen naturally if you're tough enough"

Has no systematic approach to development

You'd fire them immediately.

It would be professional negligence.

Yet this is exactly how most teams have approached mental training for decades:

- No baseline mental skills assessment
- No systematic skill development program
- One-size-fits-all approach (or no approach at all)
- Only address mental issues when someone is in crisis
- Expect mental toughness to emerge automatically from physical training
- Hope that "just being tough" will be enough

We would never accept this standard for physical preparation. Why do we accept it for mental preparation?

The answer is simple: because we can't see the mind. Because it's invisible, we've normalized low mental performance. We've accepted that players will choke, collapse, lose focus, get anxious, and struggle with self-doubt – as if these are unchangeable personality traits rather than trainable skills.

But mental skills are trainable. Measurably, systematically, predictably trainable. Just like physical skills.

The teams winning championships have figured this out. They measure mental baselines. They build progressive development programs. They track improvements. They intervene early. They treat mental performance with the same rigor they apply to physical performance.

The teams still relying on "toughen up" are competing with one arm tied behind their backs.

THE MIND/BODY TRADE-OFF

There is a tension, though. Most training programs are exploding with content regarding what's expected of a player each week. Therefore they usually have to give up something to create time for mental performance training. And many coaches are unwilling to do that.

*'You're asking me to give up
a weights session. I'm not
willing to give that up.'*

- Senior head coach

We've encountered resistance from coaches who question whether players can engage meaningfully with mental skills work – whether they have the attention span or self-awareness for it. Some would rather keep things on the field, where outcomes feel tangible. 'Keep it simple, stupid' is the refrain.

In our experience, none of this is true.

There is resistance. Most coaches are still following the conventional wisdom, caught in the age-old myth that the body is the center of the universe. The truth, of course, is that the mind is the center of the universe. It controls the show.

But here's what coaches miss: mental training doesn't diminish physical outcomes – it enhances them.

A calm, focused mind executes physical skills more efficiently.

A resilient mind recovers faster from training. A regulated mind makes better tactical decisions. An athlete with mental clarity gets more value from every weights session, every skills drill, every tactical meeting.

The question isn't whether to choose physical or mental training – it's whether you can afford to neglect either.

If coaches want to get better results with their physical program, they need to invest in creating stronger minds. Missing a few weights sessions won't hinder the physical outcome; in fact, it will enhance it. What's the point of building the strongest body if the mind that controls it collapses under pressure?

It's important to acknowledge that the relationship between mind and body is a two-way street. Gut function, the microbiome, hormones like serotonin, sleep quality, nutrition, and physical health all influence how the mind operates. The emerging science on the gut-brain axis alone is revealing just how much our physical state shapes our mental state.

This book doesn't dismiss that reality – it's simply focused on the direction that has been most neglected. We've spent decades optimising the body to extraordinary levels. What we haven't done is bring the mind forward with the same investment and urgency.

This book is about redressing that balance – not denying the body's influence on the mind, but championing the mind's influence over everything else, and giving it the training it deserves.

WHY TAPER WEEK EXPOSES THE UNTRAINED MIND

In the final week before major competitions, most teams reduce physical training load – the famous taper. It's smart sports science. The goal is sound: arrive physically fresh, muscles recovered, energy stores replenished. The problem isn't the taper itself – it's what happens to an untrained mind when the physical distraction is removed.

What often happens:

- Athletes become mentally restless
- Anxiety increases with reduced physical outlet
- Overthinking dominates
- Sleep disruption increases
- Confidence wavers
- Players report feeling "flat" or "off"

Why? Because many athletes have spent months using physical training as a natural outlet for mental stress. The constant physical load keeps the mind occupied – anxiety gets burned off, overthinking gets crowded out by exhaustion. Remove the physical outlet, and athletes are left alone with their minds, often in the lead-up to the biggest moment of their season.

For an untrained mind, that's a vulnerable place to be.

This is why teams often report feeling mentally flat or anxious despite being perfectly rested physically. The taper did its job for the body. But the mind wasn't prepared for the space it created.

Taper week doesn't create mental issues – it exposes them. For athletes who have trained their minds alongside their bodies, taper week becomes an opportunity: a chance to arrive sharp, focused, and mentally ready. For those who haven't, it's where the cracks appear.



Some coaches believe the solution is recruitment: *"We need more tough-nuts. More players with that natural grit, that edge, that aggression."*

And yes, some athletes naturally have a competitive intensity that serves them well. Physical courage, natural aggression, an instinct for combat – these are valuable traits.

But even the toughest, most naturally aggressive players have mental vulnerabilities:

- Aggression without control leads to penalties, suspensions, and critical errors
- Natural competitiveness can create crippling anxiety about losing
- Physical courage doesn't equal emotional regulation
- Intensity without mental clarity creates chaos, not performance

The most naturally "tough" players still need mental skills training. Perhaps they need it more than anyone, because unchecked aggression and unregulated intensity become liabilities at the highest levels.

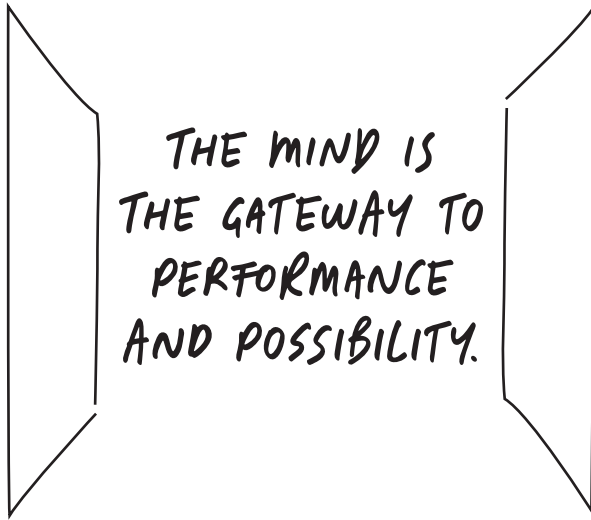
You can't recruit your way out of needing mental training, just as you can't recruit your way out of needing physical training. Both are skills that must be developed systematically, regardless of natural talent or disposition.

The complete athlete needs both fire and ice. Natural toughness provides the fire. Mental training provides the ice.

THE REALITY

A player is unlikely to demonstrate true consistency of performance unless they spend time working directly on their mind.

Toughening the mind is as important as toughening the body, and needs a unique approach.



Physical training creates one type of resilience. Mental training creates another. Elite performance requires both.

The teams still clinging to the old equation – that physical toughness automatically creates mental toughness – are losing to teams who understand the truth: the body and mind are separate systems that require separate, systematic training.

The special forces programs, the altitude camps, the brutal sessions, the “toughen up” mentality – all of these have value. But none of them replace actual mental skills training.

You cannot run your way to emotional regulation. You cannot lift your way to focus control. You cannot suffer your way to mental clarity.

These are distinct skills that require distinct training.

The question for every coach and athlete is simple: Are you

willing to train both systems with equal rigor? Or will you continue to hope that a strong body will somehow create a strong mind?

Toughening the mind is as important as toughening the body, and needs a unique approach.

The mind is the gateway to performance and possibility. But there is one common assumption about mental training that has seen many programs fail.

Isn't the mind the territory of therapy?



LET'S CHALLENGE THAT
IDEA, AND EXPLORE
WHY IT'S A TRAP TO
PATHOLOGIZE THE MIND.

"I'm not
their
F@%#ING
therapist"

A Senior Head Coach



CHAPTER 6

**PERFORMANCE
NOT
PATHOLOGY**

It's not just coaches. The players carry the same stigma. Kevin Love, an NBA champion with the Cleveland Cavaliers, put it plainly: *'For 29 years, I thought about mental health as someone else's problem. Sure, I knew on some level that some people benefited from asking for help or opening up. I just never thought it was for me. To me, it was a form of weakness that could derail my success in sports or make me seem weird or different.'*

Michael Phelps, the most decorated Olympian in history with 23 gold medals, echoed the same barrier: *'As a male athlete, I saw it as a sign of weakness. If I shared anything about it, it would give my competitors an edge.'*

Two of the greatest athletes the United States has ever produced, both saying the same thing: working on the mind felt like admitting something was wrong. That's the stigma in action. And it's the single biggest reason the mind remains the least trained part of performance.

These frank and revealing words reveal a belief about the mind that unfortunately is not uncommon among coaches: the idea that the mind is a problem we need to manage.

Although we have worked with a number of progressive senior coaches who see mental performance as a critical competitive advantage, many coaches see a mental challenge as a fault with the player, not a skill gap. They believe it's a pathological issue, an annoyance that gets in the way of performance. A problem that's not part of the game. *'I don't care what's going on in your head,'* they say, *'just go out there and perform!'*

Such coaches see the mental performance issue as something they can't do anything about. Unfortunately, they are perpetuating a stigma around the mind that's been present for generations.

THE MIND STIGMA

Historically, there has been a stigma around mental training stemming from the belief that if you have to work on your mind, there's something wrong with you – that you're broken, and you need to see a shrink. Issues in the mind have traditionally been pathologized (that is, seen as abnormal), and as a result need a diagnosis, treatment and a cure.

Mind stigma is the culturally ingrained belief that working on your mind means something is wrong with you. It's the assumption that mental training is about fixing problems rather than building skills – that you need therapy, not training.

No player wants to be seen as faulty or unstable, so many athletes don't work on their mind. They're afraid there might be something wrong with them, rather than something that is common to all of us. So they suffer in silence and hope no one notices. But under enough big game stress, their problems re-emerge.

Most players' response to mental performance issues then becomes: *'I've got to go out and train my body harder this week. That's the only tool I have.'* And ironically, it's also often the player facing the biggest mental challenges with their

performance who is the one telling everyone else around them to toughen up. They don't feel safe discussing their mind state, so they hide behind bravado and try to mask their weaknesses.

WE ARE DEALING
WITH A



WRAPPED IN
A STIGMA.

Until we remove the stigma, we prevent ourselves from accessing our number-one growth opportunity, our number-one competitive advantage, and we will still have our number-one Achilles heel in big moments under pressure.

It's also a common desire among coaches to 'not spook the players'. If it's talked about, they think, it will only make things worse. They want to avoid sending players down a rabbit hole, which they believe will affect the confidence and belief of the entire group.

Coaches and players alike are buying into the stigma that if you talk about the mind, you have a problem.

OUR STOIC HERITAGE

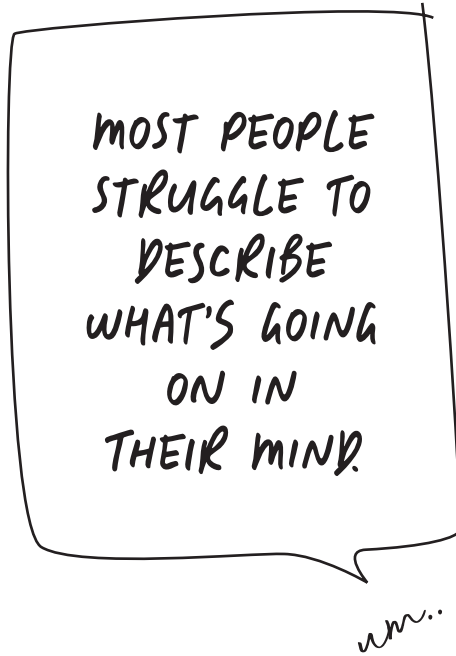
It's common to hear someone in sport or business tell another person to *'toughen the f*** up'* – particularly among men. Sharing what's actually going on inside is so foreign for many that it's not surprising there is a stigma associated with conversations about the mind.

How did we get here?

A Great Depression and two World Wars had a lot to do with it. The post-war generation tended to bury their feelings due to the hardship they'd experienced. This created a generation of people who did not share their thoughts or emotions openly. Admittedly, back then no one had the tools to respond to such experiences either.

Life was hard back then. Surviving was hard, family life was hard, and from this grew a strong sense of stoicism: that you must just get on with things, survive, and do what needed to be done, keep on keeping on.

Although the world has changed, the legacy of that attitude remains strong, particularly among Baby Boomers and Generation X. While younger generations (Millennials and Gen Z) are beginning to shift this cultural norm, the stoic heritage still casts a long shadow over how we view mental performance in high-pressure environments.



They often lack the words to describe what's going on in their head and in their heart. It's a skill that has not been passed down to them. When we ask people to share, they often have a sense of what they want to say but can't articulate their thoughts and feelings.

By normalizing the mind and creating a simple language for mental training that anyone can use, we give athletes the skills to speak about what's going on above the shoulders.

We put the mind back in their hands.

POST-CAREER CONFESSIOANAL

How often do you hear a former great of the game spill the beans about what it was actually like?

It happens all the time. They talk about the mental pressures, the hardships, dealing with fear, worry and self-doubt. You soon discover that the player who'd always appeared to be a hard nut with no vulnerabilities is just as human as you and me.

This tells us a lot.

The fact that traditionally only at the end of a career will a player open up about what's going on inside their mind shows how powerful the stigma around mental resilience has become. Players are only willing to go there once they've reached a safe space - when they're no longer at risk of being stigmatized or even cut from the team.

We are, however, starting to see this shift. High-profile athletes like Naomi Osaka, Kevin Love, DeMar DeRozan, and Andy Murray have broken the silence during their careers, speaking openly about mental health challenges and the mind's impact on performance.

Yet even with these courageous examples, it still feels like a minority willing to go public while actively competing.

Through our training, we're finding that leading players are now starting to talk more openly about how much their mind affects their performance - for good or ill.

We worked with a senior AFL player who had played almost 300 games, was a senior leader at his club and was 12 months away from retiring.

With so little to lose, he was one of the players most open to Mental Performance Training, and one of the few who was willing to admit that, even with all his experience, he still had mental moments that held him back.

He came to realize that Mental Performance Training was a skills development program, and one that would have been incredibly useful when he was younger.

'I wish this program was around when I was 18, when I really, really needed it. From the number of games you play, you do get some control over your mind, and it does quieten down to an extent, but the problem never really goes away.'

- Senior AFL player

Dealing with stigma about the mind is a challenge whether you're a veteran or a first-year recruit. And this stigma is one of the greatest barriers that limits careers, holding athletes back from unlocking their full potential.

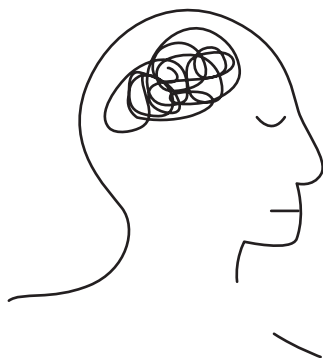
DON'T MAKE ME A PROBLEM

We've come across many players who won't see a psychologist. It speaks to a challenge that even sports psychologists we have worked with will openly acknowledge: there's a perception problem around working with the mind.

The issue isn't the quality of support that psychologists provide – it's how it's perceived. The general public's view of psychology is that its purpose is to diagnose mental health problems and fix people who have them. Of course, there is a really important place for such therapy and mental health support, but there are many ways to work with the mind that do not start with a problem you have.

We once worked with a team who had a full-time sports psychologist we collaborated with. It was the first year of Mental Performance Training with the team. We asked the players if they had consulted the sports psychologist around mental performance challenges. In most cases the response was no.

We discovered that the players had a lack of trust: they felt insufficiently safe to talk to someone with the word psychologist in their job title. The players even had a nickname for them: 'Scarecrow'. The unfair nickname said nothing about the psychologist's competence – many sports psychologists do outstanding work, and we've collaborated with many who are exceptional at what they do. It spoke to a deeper fear among the players about what engaging with psychology might mean for how they were perceived.



Those who hesitated to engage held this fear. To them, opening up about their mind meant there was something wrong with them, and that they needed to be fixed.

This is precisely why many professional teams now employ “Mental Skills Coaches” or “Mental Performance Coaches” – the shift in title creates a shift in perception. The work being done may be similar, but by positioning mental training in the performance domain rather than the pathology domain, athletes engage differently. They see it as skill development, not therapy.

This attitude is starting to shift more broadly, though. With the rise of movements around ‘mental performance’, ‘cognitive performance’, ‘mindfulness’ and ‘positive psychology’, people are increasingly interested in asking, *How can you help me improve my mind?* The focus of Mental Performance Training is on improving skills and performance, and on unlocking human potential.

We need to view the mind as an asset to strengthen, not a problem to manage.

BEYOND WELLBEING

The rise of dedicated wellbeing programs in professional sport represents one of the most important shifts in the industry's history. Athletes now have access to mental health support that simply didn't exist a generation ago, and this has saved careers and lives. The conversation around athlete mental

health has opened doors that were firmly shut for decades, and the people who have driven this movement deserve enormous credit for what they've achieved. That's genuine, significant progress.

However, we've observed a critical positioning challenge. When mental improvement programs (usually based on mindfulness or meditation) are introduced under the wellbeing umbrella with messaging like *We're going to teach you how to deal with your stress and help you relax*, they struggle to maintain priority when pressure increases.

We've seen this pattern at multiple clubs: programs are introduced with enthusiasm, athletes engage initially, but when the pressure of competition intensifies – when finals approach, when injuries mount, when results aren't coming – these programs are among the first things deprioritized. The issue isn't the quality of the program; it's the positioning.

As soon as the mind is tied to the wellbeing space, Mental Performance Training becomes a 'nice to have' rather than something essential. And this perception exists not only among coaches, but also players. *This is a relaxation thing – it's not critical to my performance*. When the pressure gets put on, it's the 'nice to have's' that go first.

All high-performance departments have three core pillars: Physical, Technical, and Tactical. These pillars receive systematic development, dedicated resources, and consistent priority regardless of external pressures. Physical conditioning doesn't get dropped when results are poor. Technical skills work doesn't disappear during finals. Tactical preparation intensifies under pressure.

MENTAL TRAINING IS THE MISSING PILLAR OF HIGH-PERFORMANCE.

This is the fundamental shift that needs to occur. When Mental Performance Training is positioned under wellbeing rather than as the fourth pillar of high performance, it gets treated differently. It becomes optional. Expendable. Something to return to “when things settle down.”

But when we establish Mental Performance Training as the fourth pillar – placing it alongside Physical, Technical, and Tactical with equal priority – everything changes. It’s no longer wellness-adjacent; it’s performance-critical.

Now when the pressure comes on, coaches and players reach for their mental performance tools with the same systematic rigor they apply to the other three pillars.

Wellbeing matters. Mental health support matters. But unless mental performance training is positioned as the fourth pillar of high performance – receiving the same systematic priority and resources as physical, technical, and tactical development – it won’t deliver the consistent results elite performance demands.

PERFORMANCE OPENS THE MIND

So to break down the stigma and do the really important work of building mental strength, we must frame Mental Performance Training as all about performance, not pathology. As soon as it moves from the wellbeing space to the performance space, it becomes both essential and approachable.

The key delineation here is that Mental Performance Training does not delve into a player's past mental health issues or childhood; rather, it clears their present so they can perform at their best. It focuses on being transparent about what's happening in the mind during the game, and deciding on a solutions-focused response.

In fact, many of the sports psychologists we've worked alongside share this frustration. They know their work builds performance, not pathology – but the perception persists regardless.

Mental Performance Training isn't a replacement for sports psychology. It's a different door into the same building. And often, once athletes walk through the performance door, they become more open to the deeper psychological work that can transform not just their game, but their lives.

By developing a mental toolkit, teams are prepared for whatever the game, or life, throws at them. Under the biggest moments, players know they've done the work to be at their best. But if they don't talk about it, and if they don't build

mental performance skills, then players have an Achilles heel that can be exploited, especially when under pressure.

We normalize the mind by naming it.

NAMING
IS TAMING.

By creating a simple language to understand it. By naming what happens when we go missing under pressure, we take away its power. We stop it from being a problem, and it instead becomes an opportunity.

As soon as we can name it, we can train it.

PERFORMANCE VS PATHOLOGY

This isn't a hierarchy. Clinical and wellbeing support serves a vital purpose, and every high-performance program should have access to it. The distinction we're drawing here is about positioning: when the goal is performance enhancement through skill development, a performance framework delivers different outcomes than a clinical one. Both matter. Both have their place. But they need to sit in different parts of the organization.

PATHOLOGY	PERFORMANCE
Mental Health	Mental Performance
Reactive	Proactive
Diagnosis	Mental Skills
Clinical Assessment	Performance Measurement
Problem Resolution	Capability Building
Treatment Plans	Training Protocols
Talking Through Issues	Measurable Development
Recovery-Oriented	Results-Oriented

We've established that the mind is not a problem to be managed but a performance asset to be developed. We've seen how stigma has held athletes back from the training that could unlock their greatest competitive advantage. And we've understood why positioning matters – performance, not pathology; the fourth pillar, not a wellness add-on.

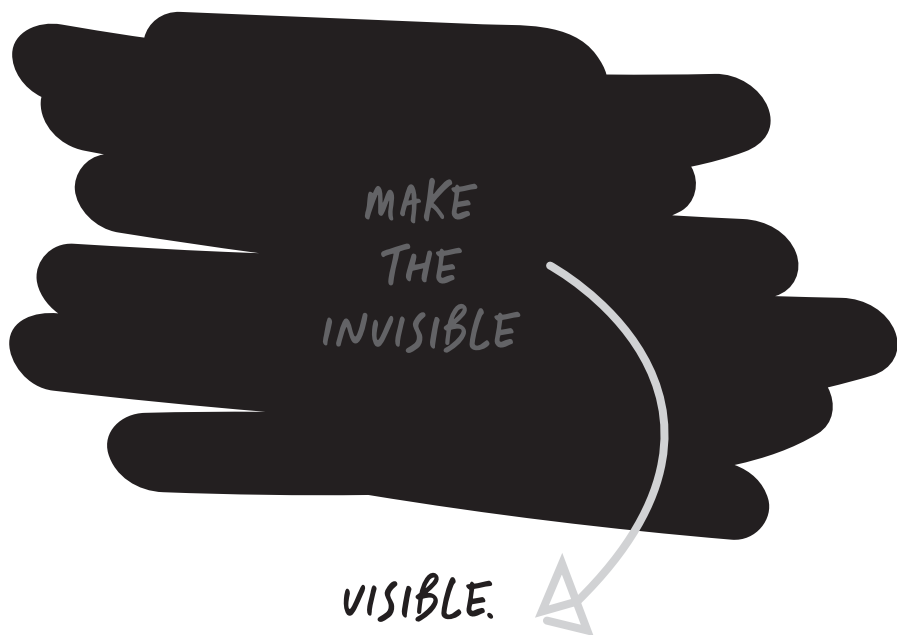
But here's where most approaches to mental training have fallen short: they treat the mind as invisible, unmeasurable, something you just "work on" without clear targets or progress tracking.

If you can't measure it, you can't systematically improve it.

Just as physical performance requires baseline measurements – speed tests, strength assessments, endurance protocols – mental performance demands the same rigor.

You wouldn't tell an athlete to "just get stronger" without first assessing where they are and tracking their development. Why would we treat the mind any differently?

The next step in our journey is to do what many thought impossible:





3RD QUARTER



*'You can't
manage what
you can't
measure.'*

Peter Drucker

Father of modern management



CHAPTER 7

MAKE THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE

Every performance environment measures what it can see. Body weight, sprint times, GPS data, heart rate, skill execution, tactical adherence. If it can be tracked, it gets tracked. Coaches, performance directors and analysts have built entire systems around visible data.

But what about what's happening above the shoulders?

The mind is the one area of performance that drives everything else – and for most programs, it remains completely unmeasured. Not because it doesn't matter. Because nobody has handed coaches the right instrument to measure it.

Until now.

PLAYING THE WRONG GAME

*"Personality tests are
fast food for the soul."*

- Dr. Benjamin Hardy

Everyone has had their personality measured at some point.

For \$39 and 15 minutes of your time, you apparently get the keys to figuring out your life and why it hasn't been working the way you want. You're a dominant or conscientious type, an introvert or an extrovert, an ideas person or a detail person. *Ahah, this is me! I finally have the answers!*

Clubs and athletes have used personality profiles for years.

So why aren't they solving the performance problems they face?

Everyone now knows who they are – shouldn't that mean they can perform when it really matters? Or perhaps the theory goes that teams just don't have the right mix of personalities. General Managers, Coaches and Recruiters spend endless hours trying to luck onto the magical recipe that creates a winning team.

This is why success can be so tricky to attain, and even harder to maintain. You're playing the Russian roulette of personality, and just when you think you've got it nailed, players get traded and the magic is gone again.

Profiling and measurement is a critical part of making all areas of performance visible – but playing the personality game is the wrong approach. There are better tools for the job.

SKILLS EAT PERSONALITY FOR BREAKFAST

Very few people have ever had their mental skill measured.

As we've established, mental lapses are not personality issues. They are skill gaps. So we need to measure the mind's role in performance – but we've been using the wrong instrument.

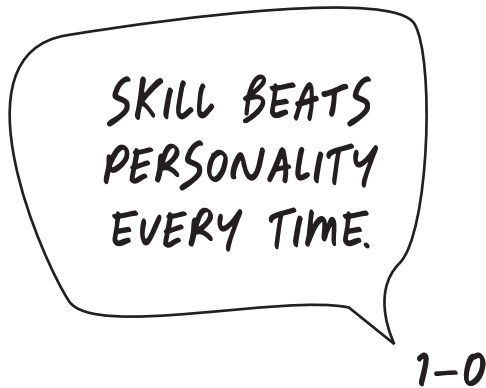
Using personality profiles to address performance problems is an outdated approach that yields poor results. It's not fit for purpose.

Personality profiles put people in a box rather than give them a plan to change. They say: *this is who you are, accept it, and be aware of your strengths and weaknesses.*

Mental Performance Training does the opposite. It says: *here's a suite of skills that are trainable, and here's exactly where you can grow to lift your performance.*

Personality profiling assumes personality is permanent – you're wired the way you're wired. Mental skill profiling shows you that these skills are universal, regardless of personality type. Here are the skills you're already great at. Here are the ones that are solid but can improve. And here are the ones that need real attention – and are most likely costing you right now.

Skills are changeable, trainable, and can shift quickly with the right work. In the time-pressured world of professional sport, it's mental skill development that's going to move the needle this weekend – not wrangling with personality types.



THE FOURTH PILLAR

Athletes get their physical, technical and tactical skills measured to the finest degree. But not their mental skill. Why?

Because until recently, we didn't have a proven way to do it. And if we can't measure it, we don't manage it. That's why mental lapses under pressure have remained the great unmanageable problem in sport.

Think about how a high performance environment is typically structured. There is a strength and conditioning program for the physical pillar. Skills coaches for the technical pillar. Analysts and tacticians for the tactical pillar. These three pillars are resourced, measured, and taken seriously.

And then there is the fourth pillar – the mental side – which is acknowledged in every post-match press conference and ignored in every training schedule.

The breakthrough came from our mentor, Dr. Don Greene – one of the pioneers of this field – who worked alongside the father of North American Applied Sport Psychology – Bruce Ogilvie. A former US Olympic Sport Psychologist and decorated Green Beret, Don has spent decades working with performers striving to do their best under extreme pressure. Athletes, SWAT officers, Grand Prix drivers, Olympic competitors.

His belief was that mental skills needed to be moved out of psychology and placed squarely in the field of performance coaching, where any person who wanted to perform at their best could access them.

His life's work was focused on decoding the high-performers he worked with – identifying the universal mental skills that separated those who showed up on the big day from those who went missing. Building from that legacy, the Mind Performance Profile was created.

The Mind Performance Profile has helped the best win big:

- 41 Olympic medals, including 15 gold
- 14 World Records
- 50 World Championship Medals
- 2 Championships
- 29 USA National Athletic Championships
- Individual accolades and career best form

It is also used by corporate executives, military and SWAT teams, emergency services personnel, and even high school students to be at their best when moments matter.

This is a systematic, validated, 30-skill Mental Performance Training program built around the Missing in Action Model – the diagnostic framework that tells you exactly where your athletes go missing under pressure, and precisely how to get them back.

This is not about sitting down for a chat. This is mental skills training from Rookie to Retiree – as systematic and measurable as anything your strength and conditioning coach puts you through.

THE MIND PERFORMANCE PROFILE

The Mind Performance Profile measures 7 dimensions of mental skill across 30 trainable areas, benchmarked against 6,000 athletes and high performance people.

Through the profile you start to make sense of what's been happening in your mind under pressure – and what needs attention. When athletes receive their debrief, the most common reaction is:

How did you know that about me?

For each skill area you receive a score of low, medium, or high performance. But it's the story that all the scores tell together – the patterns, the combinations, the hidden connections – where the real growth map lies.

The profile reveals what skills you already have in your arsenal, what's missing, and provides a clear roadmap for development. You might assume that elite athletes would already have these skills dialled in. They often don't. And when we tell them that, some push back.

How can I be performing at this level and still have gaps in my mind?

Our answer is always the same: if we got your mind anywhere near where you've got your body, imagine what you'd be capable of. We haven't come close to seeing the ceiling of human athletic performance. The biggest untapped gains are not in the gym.

1. DETERMINATION

"Desire is the key to motivation, but it's the determination and commitment to an unrelenting pursuit of your goal – a commitment to excellence – that will enable you to attain the success you seek."

- Mario Andretti

Determination is drive. It's the mental state that impels you to make things happen. It's the strength and the power of your intent. And it's the mental foundation on which the other skill sets in your profile are built. No performance can go well without true grit – the determination to perform at the outermost edge of your capabilities.

MENTAL SKILLS

- **Intrinsic Motivation** – how driven you are by internal factors: your purpose, your passion, your why.
- **Extrinsic Motivation** – how driven you are by external factors: rewards, recognition, money, fame.
- **Commitment** – your level of commitment to your performance versus competing demands elsewhere.
- **Ability to Adapt** – your comfort with uncertainty and ambiguous circumstances. High performers thrive in the unknown.

2. OUTLOOK

*"Make sure your worst enemy
doesn't live between
your own two ears."*

- Laird Hamilton

Outlook is a powerful predictor of likely outcomes in competition, as the odds are affected by your attitude towards them. Your outlook drives your self-belief, and your self-belief determines who you will become. It's a direct result of your past experiences, the quality of your inner dialogue, and your sense of expectancy – your belief in just what's possible. An optimistic outlook programs successful outcomes.

MENTAL SKILLS

- **Self Concept** - how you see yourself versus how you present externally.
- **Self Confidence** - your belief in your talents, skills and abilities.
- **Self Talk** - the quality of your internal dialogue under pressure.
- **Expectancy** - your degree of optimism or pessimism about outcomes.

3. FOCUS

*"Focus equals power.
Flow follows focus.
No focus, no flow."*

- Amon Woulfe

Focus is your ability to direct your full attention to the task at hand and sustain it. From having a clear mind to make critical decisions, through to executing under pressure – focus is an essential skill for high performance. Whether you're in front of 50,000 or 5 people, being able to lock in on demand is what creates consistent performance.

MENTAL SKILLS

- **Ability to Focus** - your ability to enter a focused state when performing.
- **Ability to Be Present** - your ability to stay anchored in the current moment rather than the past or future.
- **Duration of Focus** - your ability to sustain focus for the full length of your performance.

4. DISTRACTIBILITY

*"Starve your distractions,
feed your focus."*

- Anonymous

Distractibility measures the factors that prevent you from directing full attention to the task at hand. Sometimes the distraction comes from a busy mind. Other times it comes from an inability to filter out what's happening externally. Both are trainable – but first you need to know which is pulling you away.

MENTAL SKILLS

- **External Distractibility** - your ability to resist distractions in your environment: movement, noise, crowd, opposition.
- **Internal Distractibility** - your ability to quieten your mind when you need to perform.
- **Situational Focus** - your ability to generate focus regardless of the occasion.

5. ENERGY

"Energy is the currency of high performance."

- Tony Schwartz

Performance success is based on the skillful management of mental energy. It's how calm or how activated you feel before you compete, what your optimal energy state is, and how effective you are at managing it. It's ensuring that you have an appropriate level of bandwidth to meet the pressure of the situation you will face.

MENTAL SKILLS

- **Optimal Energy** - whether you perform at your best in a calm or raised energy state.
- **Performance Energy** - the actual level of energy you bring just before a performance.
- **Ability to Energize** - your ability to raise your performance energy when needed.
- **Ability to Calm** - your ability to lower your performance energy when it's running too high.
- **Ability to Recover** - your ability to restore your system through quality sleep and recovery.

6. COURAGE

"Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage."

- Anaïs Nin

Courage is your ability to respond effectively to stressors and circumstances. It involves your perception of mental pressure, how you approach difficult tasks, and how you view performance failure and success. It's the ability to lean in and do what's necessary, rather than what's easy.

MENTAL SKILLS

- **Perform Under Pressure** - your ability to use performance stress to excel rather than be undone by it.
- **Ability to Risk** - your appetite for taking risks when the moment demands it.
- **Fear of Failure** - your ability to embrace failure as part of growth.
- **Fear of Success** - your ability to embrace success and all that comes with it.

7. MENTAL TOUGHNESS

"If you want to be tougher mentally, it is simple: be tougher. Don't meditate on it. Being tougher is, more than anything, a decision to be tougher."

- Jocko Willink, Navy SEAL

Mental Toughness is your willpower and inner strength going into performance situations, how you respond to adverse circumstances, and your ability to get past inevitable mistakes and setbacks. It's what separates those who collapse under pressure from those who find another gear.

MENTAL SKILLS

- **Ability to Fight** - your capacity to compete hard when your back is against the wall.
- **Ability to Reset** - your ability to bounce back quickly after a mistake.
- **Emotional Regulation** - your ability to manage your emotions under pressure without them managing you.
- **Responsibility** - your ability to accept full responsibility for your performance.

THE TOP FOUR MISSING IN ACTION PROFILES

Through years of reviewing Mind Performance Profiles, four key profiles emerge consistently – the combinations of mental underdevelopment that explain why players go missing in action. Every profile is trainable. Every score can be shifted. But first, you need to know what you're dealing with.

THE AGITATED HOT HEAD

It's a big game, tight scoreline, contentious referee call. Within seconds, one player is gone. They're arguing with the official, gesturing at teammates, burning energy at a rate that would exhaust them by halftime even if they weren't playing. Their teammates are watching, unsettled. The opposition have noticed. And the referee is reaching for a pocket.

This player's profile tells a consistent story. Their performance energy sits well above their optimal energy – they're wound up tight before the first whistle even blows. And once something ignites them, they have no mechanism to bring themselves down. Their ability to calm is critically low. An agitated nervous system combined with low emotional regulation creates a reactive player rather than a responsive one. How many games have been lost through penalties handed to the reactive hot head?

But there's more to it. The hot head typically profiles with low responsibility and high ability to fight. When they react, they

blame everything around them – the referee, the crowd noise, the opposition niggling. They struggle to own their response. Teach them the skill of responsibility, develop their ability to down-regulate, and you'll see a transformation. That high ability to fight is a genuine asset. The job is directing that fire rather than letting it burn the game down.

MENTAL SKILL GAPS

- Performance Energy above Optimal Energy
- Low Ability to Calm
- Low Emotional Regulation
- Low Responsibility
- High Ability to Fight

THE ANXIOUS WORRIER

This player looks fine in training all week. In the warm-up, they seem switched on. Then the game begins, and something changes. They hesitate where they'd normally commit. They take the safe option when the risky one was clearly on. They look fumbly, overwhelmed, like they're carrying a weight nobody else can see – because they are.

The anxious worrier profiles with a busy mind, reflected in a low internal distractibility score. Neuroscience is clear: the busier the mind, the lower the performance. That unending internal dialogue – constant analysing, worrying, commenting – is their left brain hemisphere overworking when it should be

quiet. A busy mind is not a personality trait. It's simply a mind that hasn't been trained.

This player also profiles with low ability to be present – their head is in the future, pre-playing everything that could go wrong. You'll see low ability to risk and high fear of failure combined. The skill of courage needs targeted development here. And look for a low expectancy score: they're pessimistic about outcomes before the game even starts. You never perform above your expectancy.

MENTAL SKILL GAPS

- High Internal Distractibility
- Low Expectancy
- Low Ability to Be Present
- Low Ability to Risk
- High Fear of Failure

THE FOGGY FLOATER

They have the talent. Everyone in the building knows it. On their day, they're exceptional. The problem is you can never be sure which version will show up. One week they're electric, the next they're barely there – drifting through passages of play, arriving late to contests, looking like they're operating at half-speed.

The profile behind the foggy floater starts with a low ability to focus and often a low duration of focus score. They get

distracted easily, and wherever attention goes, reality follows. But focus alone doesn't explain the full picture. They also profile with a low ability to energize – pre-game they'll be too quiet, too flat in their preparation. While the hot head is over-cooked, the floater is under-cooked.

Finally, look for a low ability to recover score – their capacity to handle increasing pressure is compromised by a system that isn't fully restored between performances. When game intensity rises, instead of rising with it, they fade. All of this is trainable. The floater just needs to learn how to turn the dial up.

MENTAL SKILL GAPS

- Low Ability to Focus
- Low Duration of Focus
- Performance Energy under Optimal Energy
- Low Ability to Energize
- Low Ability to Recover

THE CRITICAL PERFECTIONIST

After a mistake, many players can move on. Not this player. You can watch the moment it happens – a missed tackle, a fumble, a poor decision – and see something shift in their body language. Shoulders drop. Eyes go to the ground. And for the next ten minutes, they're still back at that moment, relitigating it, while the game has moved on without them.

The critical perfectionist profiles with a busy, self-critical mind. Low self-talk and low self-concept mean that when something goes wrong, they become their own harshest critic. Their perfectionism means they are rarely satisfied, and they struggle to enjoy the process of competing. Low situational focus explains why they often perform brilliantly when their back is against the wall but struggle to start strongly – they need adversity to activate, because adversity temporarily shuts the inner critic up.

The good news: all of these are trainable skills. When the critical perfectionist learns to manage their internal dialogue and lower the bar from perfect to excellent, their consistency transforms.

MENTAL SKILL GAPS

- High Internal Distractibility
- Low Self Concept
- Low Self Talk
- Low Situational Focus
- Low Ability to Reset

STRESS - THE SECRET INGREDIENT

There is one more layer to the Mind Performance Profile that goes deeper than mental skills alone – and it's one most

athletes have never thought about measuring.

Your mind doesn't operate in isolation. It operates inside a body that is either helping it perform or quietly working against it. And the primary variable that determines which is happening at any given moment is stress – specifically, how much of it is already loaded into your system before you even run onto the field.

The ability to regulate stress in high pressure, high consequence environments is what keeps the brain's executive functions online.

Decision-making, emotional control, focus, spatial awareness – all of it depends on a nervous system that isn't already maxed out before the contest begins. When stress exceeds an athlete's bandwidth, the cognitive brain starts to shut down.

That's not a personality failing. It's a physiological fact.

Athletes who look composed on the surface can be carrying a stress load that tells an entirely different story underneath – already at 60, 70, even 80 percent capacity before they've faced a single moment of game pressure.

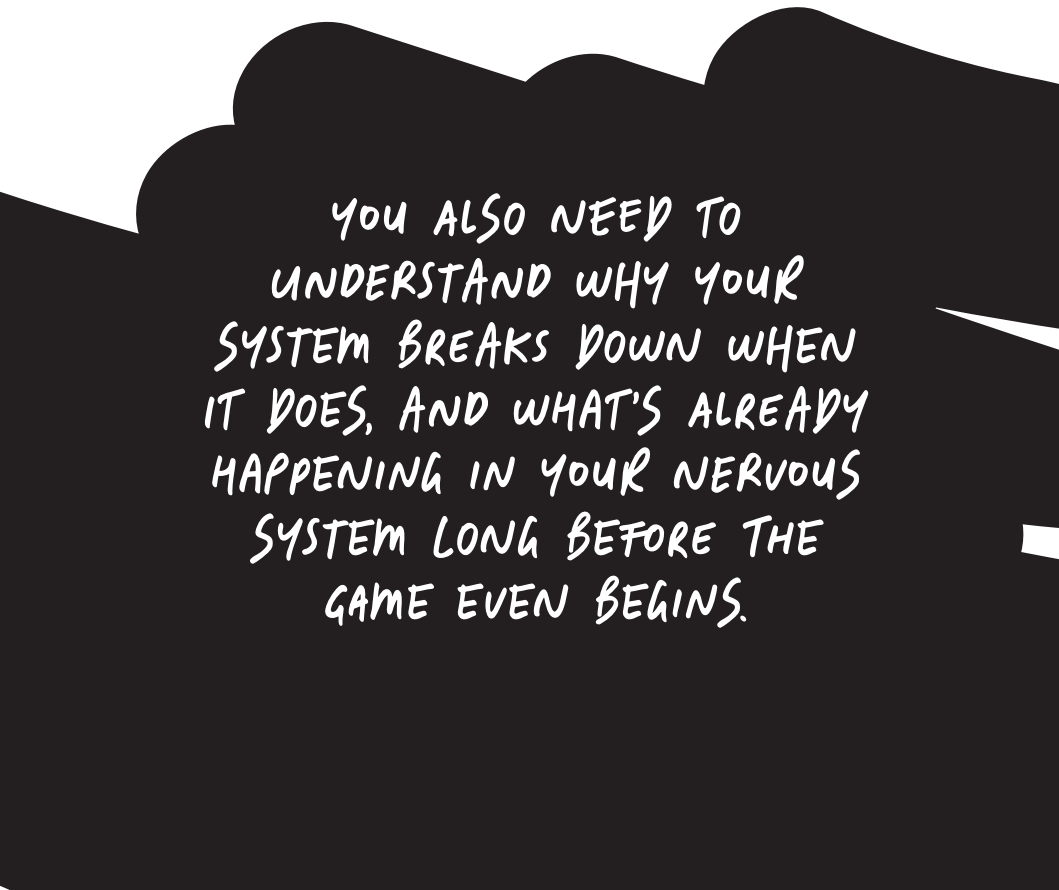
Their mental quiet scores are low. Their bandwidth is compressed. And when the real pressure comes – a bad call, a moment of adversity, a high-stakes decision – there's almost nothing left in reserve.

This is why stress regulation is the fourth dimension of the Mind Performance Profile.

Not as a wellbeing concern. As a performance variable. Because just as mental skills are trainable, the stress response is manageable – and the athletes who learn to manage it carry a significant advantage over those who don't.

The tool that connects mental skill development with stress regulation – the framework that explains how your biology and your performance interact under pressure – is what we call the Stress Curve.

Because knowing where you go missing is only half the answer.



YOU ALSO NEED TO
UNDERSTAND WHY YOUR
SYSTEM BREAKS DOWN WHEN
IT DOES, AND WHAT'S ALREADY
HAPPENING IN YOUR NERVOUS
SYSTEM LONG BEFORE THE
GAME EVEN BEGINS.

"Tightness and nerves happen to everybody. For myself, or anyone that has played sports, to say they didn't 'choke', they are lying to you."

Pete Sampras

Former Tennis world number ONE



CHAPTER 8

BUY NOW, PAY LATER



PERFORMANCE UNDER PRESSURE IS ALL ABOUT STRESS.

Players go missing because they have gone into a high-grade stress response and they don't know how to get out of it. They've maxed out their nervous system and are unable to reset. Most players know that stress is affecting them, but what they don't recognize is that it's their brain that collapses first, then their body.

From a neuroscience perspective, high stress has a diabolical impact on the prefrontal cortex, which controls executive functions such as thinking, memory, emotional regulation and motor skills. Under high stress, our brain's ability to function effectively starts to shut down as we go into a survival response. This is why the player "isn't thinking" out there – that part of their brain is literally shutting down. Motor skills collapse, decision-making is impaired and spatial recognition shuts down. The player loses control of their focus and energy, and suddenly they don't look like the same player anymore.

The player starts doing things that seem completely out of character – things that definitely weren't trained for. Teammates and coaches alike are watching on in confusion. "What the hell are they doing out there?"



**It's the player's cognitive brain
shutting down, it's not their
personality acting up.**

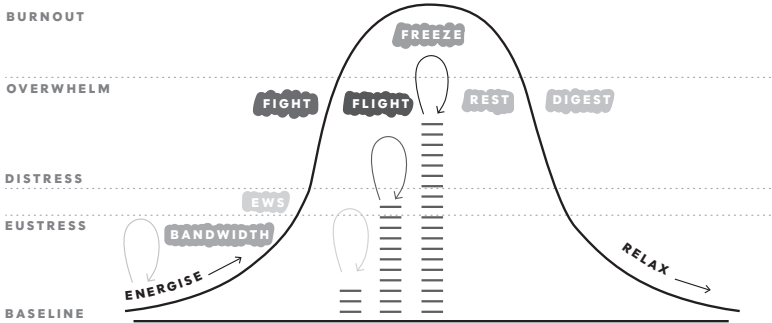
So the next time you see a player ball-watching, arguing with the ref, getting fumbly and making mistakes, beating themselves up – the next time you call them chokers, heartless, selfish, flaky and lacking backbone – try to recognize that they are struggling to manage a high-grade stress response in their brain. It's not intentional, and it's not a sign that they don't care. They don't want this to happen either. The problem is that they haven't been trained to manage their mind under pressure.

Going missing in action is more about your ability to regulate your nervous system than anything to do with your personality.

 **IT'S MORE
BIOLOGY THAN PSYCHOLOGY.** 

An overactive nervous system leads to an overactive mind, and if you can't get control of your stress, you'll never get control of your mind. So the first step is to learn to control your nervous system – and that means mastering the Stress Curve.

THE STRESS CURVE



On every day of your life, you have a natural rise and fall in the arousal state of your nervous system. Two key hormones control the upregulation of your nervous system:

Cortisol: Fuel for your car.

Adrenaline: Nitrous oxide for your car.

Regulating adrenaline in key performance moments is important, but cortisol, which is a far subtler factor, can in fact be more detrimental to performance.

Known as the classic stress hormone, cortisol can cause a range of cognitive impairments under pressure. But cortisol is not all bad. You need some cortisol, as it is vital for the process of mobilizing energy, helping immune function and fighting inflammation. However, as with many things, the key is balance. Too much or too little can be bad for you.

Cortisol typically takes 15–30 minutes to peak, meaning it needs time to build up, unlike adrenaline, which you feel within seconds. Release of cortisol can also be sustained, where we build up a consistently elevated stress profile. Adrenaline, on the other hand, will be instantly intense, like your heart jumping, but it will burn off quickly.

Here's what matters for performance:

You can reset adrenaline in seconds with the right tools. Cortisol requires sustained down-regulation – which is why post-game recovery routines matter as much as pre-game activation. Both need training. Neither happens automatically.

Cortisol is meant to rise and fall each day, waking us up in the morning and then winding down in the evening so we can sleep. This curve is known as the Cortisol Awakening Response (CAR), and is measured by taking five saliva samples throughout the day. This builds an accurate stress profile, which reveals how your physiology is creating and responding to stress and stressors.

Understanding your Stress Curve – which shows what level of stress loading you are carrying, and how your body is responding to performance stressors – is essential. When the Stress Curve starts to get too high, we see issues not only with performance pressure and mental resilience, but also with sleep, recovery, Heart Rate Variability (HRV) and immune function. A sustained build-up in CAR can see a player get “overwhelmed by the occasion” in the big moments.

So how does the Stress Curve connect to the brain? It's simple. When we go into a high-grade stress response, our

prefrontal cortex (the thinking brain) starts to shut down as we switch into a survival response. The ancient and primitive parts of our brain get activated, our thoughts get irrational, we lose control of our emotions, we get "tunnel vision", we stop communicating and our fine motor skills go. The only thing the brain can think of is: *How do I survive?* Unable to think clearly, we start acting in ways that seem completely out of character.

**PERFORMANCE UNDER
PRESSURE HAS NOTHING
TO DO WITH PERSONALITY,
AND EVERYTHING TO DO
WITH STRESS MASTERY.**

Patrick Mahomes, widely considered the most dominant quarterback in the NFL today, has spoken openly about this: *'It's about controlling what I can control and staying focused on the task at hand.'* That's stress mastery in the language of the locker room. Not too high on the curve, not too low. Staying in the zone where the mind works for you rather than against you.

Imagine you are an athlete preparing for a championship game. The build-up is intense. There are great expectations of you and the team. The media and your fans are demanding, and you feel an immense pressure to perform. It seems like your legacy is on the line, not to mention your next contract.

You want to make your family and friends proud, and you're desperate not to let your teammates down.

How many athletes are aware of the stress they are carrying into a game? How many know whether their cortisol is in a healthy range, or they're at a high risk of overwhelm, collapsing, or choking? How many coaches are aware of who has plenty of bandwidth to perform, and whose mind is a millimeter from collapse?

Too many athletes are simply cooked before they even run out onto the ground. The game is lost before it begins. And all the onlookers witness the inevitable outcome of a process that began days, weeks or even months before.

Athletes are buying stress all week long – through poor sleep, conflict, criticism, worry, social media. They think they can defer the cost, that their physical conditioning will cover the debt. But stress doesn't work on credit.

When game day arrives, the bill comes due, and you pay with your performance.

Let's understand the Stress Curve in more detail, so we know what we are working with.

EUSTRESS

Each day our energy regulates up and down. We get going in the morning, and then we wind down at night. Of course there are multiple minor shifts in your energy up and down throughout the day, but overall it follows this trend of rise and fall.

Remember, not all stress is bad. If we don't get our healthy cortisol rise in the morning, we won't be able to get out of bed. Welcome to chronic fatigue, where our natural CAR response has collapsed.

But assuming our CAR is in the healthy range, then we experience what is known as eustress, the healthy mobilization of cortisol that gets us up and going. Our body upregulates in a healthy green range in the morning, giving us energy for the day.

This is your optimal activation state:

- Alert but not anxious.
- Focused but not fixated.
- Energized but not frantic.

This is where peak performance lives. This is the zone where your measured mental skills actually translate into performance.

Remember, the Mind Performance Profile measures your baseline capacity – but your ability to stay in this zone under pressure determines whether you can access that capacity when it counts.

BASELINE

Everyone has a baseline. This is a state where you have recovered perfectly, your brain and body has healed, you've removed the stress from your nervous system, and you jump out of bed in the morning feeling fully refreshed and ready to take on the world.

Many people can't remember the last time they experienced their baseline, or even what it should feel like. The human body is incredible at re-norming, so we often have no idea how much stress loading we are actually carrying.

But if you're dragging your heels out of bed every day, if you're reaching for the coffee so you can feel alive, if your sleep is regularly disrupted, if you're always feeling fatigued, then you can be sure you are nowhere near your baseline.

Remember, the brain uses 20 percent of your body's total energy at rest. Even sitting still, your mind is working. Add stress, and that percentage skyrockets. Mental load is invisible but real – and it drains your capacity just as surely as physical training does.

YOU CAN EXHAUST YOURSELF, WITHOUT LIFTING A TOE.

The closer you get to your baseline every morning, the more bandwidth you'll have for when you need to respond to stressors.

BANDWIDTH

Every person has a bandwidth, or a level of arousal that our physiology and brain can tolerate before we go into a stress response.

A special forces soldier has a very high bandwidth, as they've trained themselves to keep their brain's executive thinking

functions operating when under immense stress. Athletes generally have a slightly lower bandwidth, as they regularly experience high pressure but it's not life and death. Emergency services workers, CEOs, pilots, nurses, construction workers – everyone has a bandwidth for stress tolerance before things start to go haywire.

Ideally, each day we experience a healthy rise in eustress, gently clipping our bandwidth and coming down again. We are staying at your growth edge, without overwhelming our nervous system.

*IF WE BLOW OUR BANDWIDTH,
THAT'S WHEN WE GO MISSING.*

Remember, toughening the body doesn't toughen the mind. You can have the most physically conditioned athlete in the world, but if they haven't trained their nervous system to handle high stress loads, they'll collapse under pressure just the same.

And here's the good news: **bandwidth is trainable.**

You're not stuck with the nervous system you were born with. You can expand your capacity. You can learn to recognize your early warning signs. You can develop tools to reset rapidly when you cross the line. But it requires deliberate training of the mind, not just the body.

How do we know when our bandwidth is about to be blown? Each of us has a range of signals that will fire, warning us (and others) that things are about to go bad.

EARLY WARNING SIGNS

These signs are like the engine light coming on. There's something wrong with the system and you need to attend to it right now. Yet many of us ignore the signs and blow straight through our bandwidth.

What do these signs look like? It depends on the person, but in the sporting context they may include:

- Darting eyes
- Shaking leg
- Altered breath
- Tightening of muscles
- Clenched fists
- Narrowed focus
- Reduced communication
- Argumentativeness
- Internalizing of emotions
- Shifted body language
- Noisy mind

In general life, signs of stress overload might include:

- Nail-biting
- Comfort food
- Increased alcohol consumption
- Snappiness
- Emotional distancing
- Impatience
- Withdrawal

Really, there are countless early warning signs, and they differ for each of us. It's also often far easier to notice them in someone else than in yourself.

Here's what your Mind Performance Profile reveals:

Your Distractibility score predicts how early or late you'll notice these warning signs. Athletes with low Distractibility catch the signals early and reset before going over. Athletes with high Distractibility miss the signals entirely and only realize they've crossed the line after their performance has already collapsed.

What's important is to build your awareness of the signs, and to be able to regulate your Stress Curve in response on a moment-by-moment basis.

Importantly, the work needs to be done before you get into the game; it's not just about using tools and tactics to regulate your stress within the game. If your stress bandwidth is almost full before you start, it's going to be very difficult for you to use tools and techniques to regulate your stress when the additional pressure comes on.

THE WORK NEEDS
TO BE DONE **BEFORE**
YOU GET INTO
THE GAME. 

DISTRESS (FIGHT/FLIGHT)

Once you blow through your bandwidth, you enter a distress phase and experience the classic “fight or flight” response. You either want to punch someone’s lights out or run away.

When you reach this point, the brain’s function has been compromised and your body is unable to do what it is used to doing. Your motor skills become erratic, your “touch” starts to go, your decision-making becomes impaired and your clarity of thought disappears.

An athlete’s focus and energy can become very variable in this state, and we see great inconsistency in their performance.

One minute they’re there, the next minute they’re not. Mistakes can start to compound: one penalty leads to another, and timing and execution become clunky. The player looks like a shadow of their best self, and they’re just hoping they can run it out.

This is where athletes become **Anxious** (defending against everything) or **Agitated** (attacking everything and everyone). Same biology, different expression.

OVERWHELM (FLOP)

If a distress response continues for long enough, we enter a state of overwhelm and “flop”. The brain is becoming overwhelmed by high levels of sustained cortisol, exacerbated by hits of adrenaline, and it begins the process of shutting down.

This isn't full freeze – it's immobilization. Resignation. You give up without completely collapsing. You're physically present but mentally absent. Going through the motions. Floating. Fading in races. Collapsing in the fourth quarter.

Everything we do seems too slow, and yet time speeds up around us. Everything feels harder than usual, and our body just can't respond, as it starts to follow our collapsing mind. The game can seem to be over in the blink of an eye; sometimes an athlete can barely remember what happened.

Coaches will likely notice that a player's GPS numbers are right down as well – average speed, highest speed, distance covered. It's not that the player isn't trying, it's that their primary operating system is going offline.

This is the zone most coaches miss. The athlete looks engaged on the surface – they're running, they're involved – but they've already checked out internally. They haven't frozen completely – they've just stopped fighting.

You've seen this. The player who was dominating in the first half, then goes invisible after halftime. Not injured. Not tired. Just... gone.

This is where athletes go **Foggy** (disconnected, drifting) or **Critical** (attacking themselves instead of the opponent). Their mind has left the building while their body stumbles through the motions.

FREEZE

In extreme cases, a player can even experience a freeze response. This might be sparked by a traumatic injury, such as a head clash or a broken bone, and stress response can be so high that the player's body goes into complete survival shutdown.

It's not common on the sporting field, though it does happen: think of NBA player Gordon Hayward fracturing his tibia and dislocating his ankle, or NHL player Clint Malarchuk having his carotid artery sliced open.

But it's more common in other professions, such as soldiers in combat, or emergency services personnel at crash scenes, or hospital staff dealing with trauma victims.

The effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and complete nervous system overwhelm plague many professions, but fortunately this is rare in sports.

STRESS IS A LAYERING PROCESS

We rarely start from zero. Allostatic load is the scientific term for "the price the body pays for containing the effects of arousing stimuli and the expectation of negative consequences". Simply put, stress layers into the nervous system, the mind and the body.

THE **BODY WILL TAKE,**
WHAT THE MIND
CAN'T HANDLE.

At a physiological level it can look like this:

- Heart rate increases
- Blood pressure increases
- Blood vessels open and pump sugars and fats around the body
- Respiratory drive increases
- Sweat increases
- Blood gets thicker
- Inflammatory chemicals activate
- The brain's attention center switches on

If you're not skilled at down-regulating and deloading stress layering each day, then you wake up carrying yesterday's debt.

This means that instead of having 100 percent of your bandwidth available, you might have 70 percent.

Here's what this looks like in reality:

Imagine an athlete who slept poorly last night (20 percent stress load). They had an argument with their partner this morning (another 25 percent). They got criticized by the coach at training (another 30 percent). They're worried about selection next week (another 20 percent).

Before the game even starts, they're already at 95 percent capacity. They've been buying stress on credit all week. Now, in the moment that matters most. One referee decision. One turnover. One critical moment - and they're done.

Physical stress layers. Mental stress layers. Emotional stress layers. Life stress layers. And it all counts toward your total bandwidth.

This is why athletes collapse in situations that shouldn't overwhelm them. It's not that the moment was too big - it's that they arrived at the moment already carrying too much load. Their cup was full before the competition even started.

Most players wait for the end of the season to deload, meaning their stress layering builds week by week. The problem with this strategy is that, ideally, you want to be playing at your best in the last game of the season, not the first. But with regular stress layering, an athlete's bandwidth is most compromised when the pressure and the stakes are highest. No wonder we see so many inconsistent performances under pressure.

If you have 30 percent layering, then you're likely hitting your early warning signs every day. If you have 50 percent layering, you're probably going into a fight-or-flight response on a regular basis. If you have 70 percent layering, you're one bad ref's call away from losing your head completely. Some players may even be cooked before they arrive for the match, already in a state of overwhelm.

When a player goes missing in action on the field, it is merely the outcome of an overloaded nervous system that's been building up to a breaking point over some time. To be at your best in that moment, the real work must begin long before you run onto the field.

MASTERING THE STRESS CURVE

To prevent the mind from going into a high-grade stress response, and the body from following it there, a player must have the skills to do four things:

1. Get back to your baseline
2. Increase your bandwidth
3. Rapidly reset when you blow your bandwidth
4. Deepen your baseline

NERVOUS
SYSTEM
CONTROL
IS CRITICAL
FOR HIGH
PERFORMANCE.

If you lose control of this, you lose control of your mind and your body. And if that happens, you will go missing in action.

SO WHERE DO YOU GO?

Now you understand what happens when stress pushes you past your bandwidth. Your nervous system switches from performance to survival. Your measured mental skills collapse. You go missing in action.

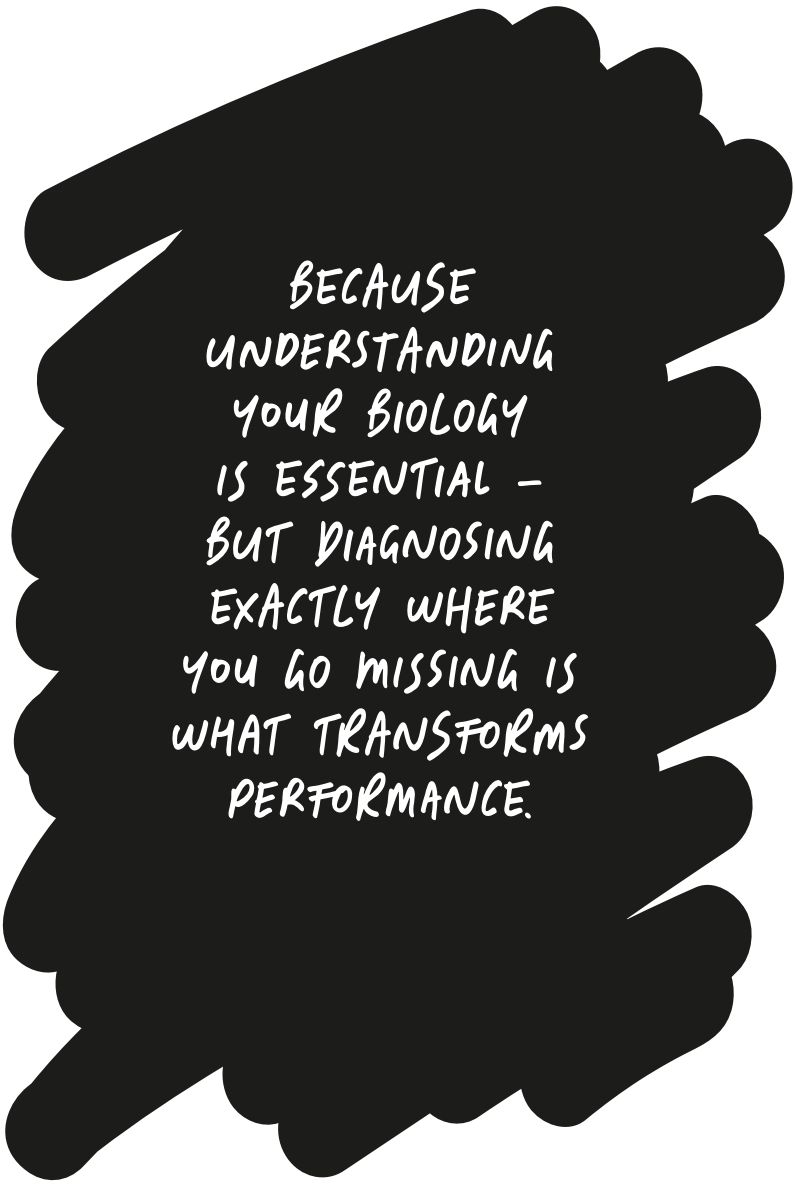
But knowing the biology doesn't tell you where you go mentally when you cross that line.

That's where the Missing in Action Model comes in.

Four specific, identifiable mind states. Four distinct patterns athletes fall into when their nervous system switches from performance to survival.

1. **Anxious.** Defending desperately, playing not to lose rather than to win.
2. **Agitated.** Attacking everything and everyone, including teammates.
3. **Critical.** Attacking yourself, drowning in negative self-talk.
4. **Foggy.** Disconnected and drifting, going through the motions.

Each one has its own signature. Each one shows up on different parts of the Stress Curve. Each one requires different intervention. And each one can be measured, diagnosed, and reset.

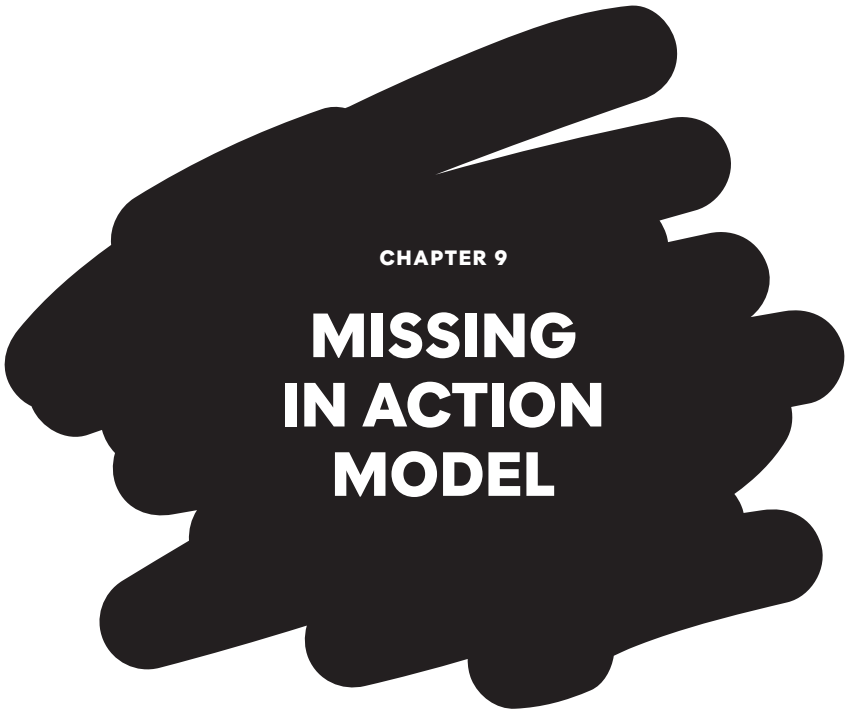


BECAUSE
UNDERSTANDING
YOUR BIOLOGY
IS ESSENTIAL –
BUT DIAGNOSING
EXACTLY WHERE
YOU GO MISSING IS
WHAT TRANSFORMS
PERFORMANCE.

"One of the fascinating things about any form of high-stress, high-level competition is there's no real guidelines around how to prepare your mind... there's very few real rock-solid programs of how to manage your mind. I think you should be taught in a step-by-step basis."

Joe Rogan

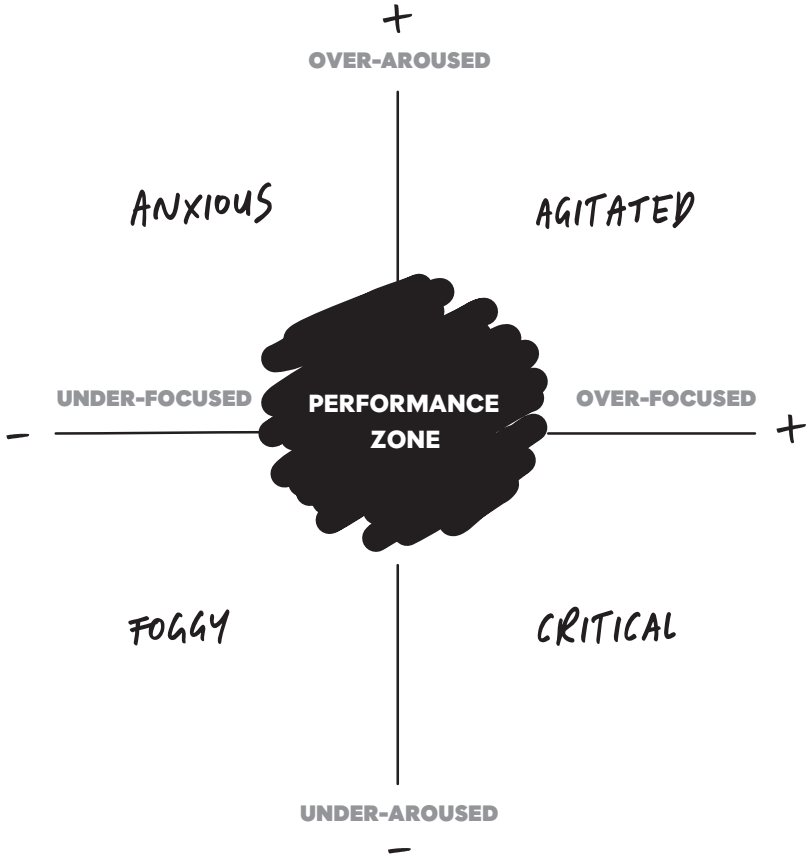
Podcaster and UFC commentator



CHAPTER 9

**MISSING
IN ACTION
MODEL**

The Missing In Action Model

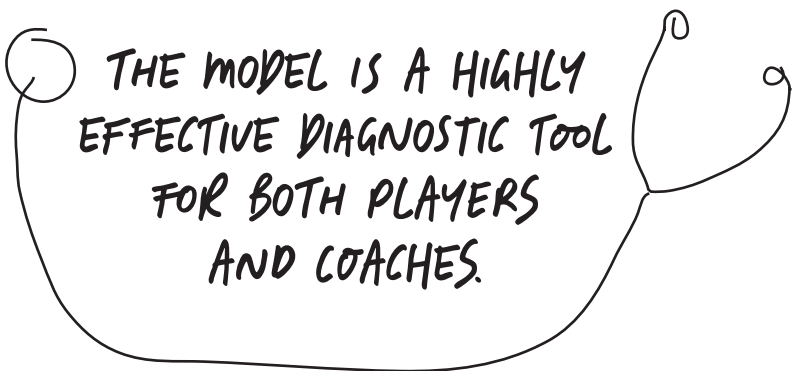


Joe Rogan is right – there are very few rock-solid, systematic skill training programs for managing the mind under pressure. Until now. The Missing in Action Model is that step-by-step system athletes have been missing.

The Missing in Action Model is a simple, proven, step-by-step approach for understanding where the mind goes under stress. We developed this model over years working with athletes across the NRL, AFL, NBL, English Football League, Indian Super League, World Wakeboard Championship, Ironwoman competitions, Equestrian Vaulting, and elite Swimming.

The Mind Performance Profile has measured over 10,000 mental performance profiles and tracked performance patterns across thousands of high-pressure moments. This isn't theory – it's field-tested reality from elite dressing rooms across multiple codes.

That's why players find it so easy to identify with – it's in their own language.



It's highly effective at minimizing mental lapses, and leads to greater levels of consistency, both in individuals and across a team.

When players break through their stress bandwidth, they all move into a stress response. However, as the model reveals, they don't all go to the same place. Each of the four mind states of the Missing in Action Model has unique characteristics.

As a coach, you cannot help your players reset their minds unless you recognize where they've gone. Why? Because each mental state requires a different response. That is why this model is so powerful. Without it, coaches and players are powerless to recognize the mental state they are in, and therefore unable to take the necessary steps to correct it.

This model also gives coaches and players a common vocabulary. Instead of vague instructions like 'settle down' or 'get up' or 'dig in' – phrases that mean different things to different people – you can say 'you're agitated' or 'you've gone foggy.' Everyone immediately knows exactly what that means and what to do about it.

**A SHARED LANGUAGE
TRANSFORMS HOW
TEAMS COMMUNICATE
UNDER PRESSURE.**

THE PERFORMANCE ZONE: EVERYTHING IN BALANCE

"To be neither distracted or focused, rigid or flexible, passive or aggressive. I learned just to be."

- Kobe Bryant, five-time NBA Champion

The Performance Zone can be defined as an optimal state of focus and energy. Everything feels available to the athlete, the game feels effortless, they feel they can run all day and they have perfect clarity from play to play. It is the gateway to peak performance.

When you're fully in the moment and your focus and energy is perfect, there is no past or future, so it's impossible to be anxious or worried.

On 25 October 2018, NBA player Steph Curry dropped 51 points in three quarters. What was most interesting was that he looked so relaxed, almost like he didn't really care. It was effortless, because what he didn't focus on was the result. What he did focus on was the moment. He got into the Performance Zone, and the points took care of themselves.

The Performance Zone isn't about being calm or relaxed – it's about being optimally activated. Your focus is sharp but flexible. Your energy is high but controlled. You're intense without being tense. This is where your Mental Performance Training shows up when it matters most.

We want to maximize the time spent in the Performance Zone. This is where individuals play their best game. They're playing the way they want to play. It doesn't necessarily mean the game will be easy, nor does it mean the game will go their way. It does mean, however, that this player is present. They're able to affect the outcome. They accept what is happening around them and they respond to it, rather than reacting.

When a player is in the Performance Zone, they have an internal sense of being the author of their performance. It is created by them – it doesn't happen to them. They lead themselves and are in control of their focus, energy and performance, regardless of the result. They are at their strongest and most resilient.

'I showed up fully today,' a player might say after the match. 'I played my game. I played to my strengths. I played to my trademark. I contributed, and I gave my team and myself every chance of success on the day. I can put my head on the pillow tonight knowing that I gave it everything that I had, and that was enough.'

**A PLAYER ISN'T IN THE PERFORMANCE ZONE
FOR EVERY SECOND OF THE GAME.**

Elite athletes don't stay in the Performance Zone for 80 minutes straight – nobody does. The mind naturally drifts; it's designed to scan for threats and opportunities. The difference between elite and average performers isn't that they never leave the Performance Zone – it's how quickly they recognize they've drifted out.

ELITE ATHLETES CATCH THEMSELVES WITHIN 10-15 SECONDS, NOT 10-15 MINUTES.

They minimize the dropout time, not eliminate it. And when they do get knocked into a negative mind state – which happens to everyone – they’ve trained the ability to rapidly reset back to the Performance Zone within seconds.

The premise of this book is that the mind is not perfect, and all of us do go missing. It’s chaos out there. Every week is a new challenge, with limitless variables: the opposition, the weather, injuries, the bounce of the ball. The ability to stand in the eye of the storm, with balanced focus and energy, and to play the game on their terms and in their way is the hallmark of a great athlete.

We must recognize that every player’s mind will lapse. Players are not machines. The challenge now becomes how quickly they recognize they’ve checked out, and how quickly they can get back into the Performance Zone.

In professional sport, ten seconds can mean your next contract. Ten seconds can shape a career. Ten seconds can define a legacy. Players can’t afford to go missing for a long time. By having mental performance awareness, they can minimize the time they are missing in action, and maximize the time they can affect the moments that matter.

FOCUS: AN ALERT STATE OF READINESS

Focus is power. No focus, no flow. Our brains simply cannot get into the peak performance state of 'the zone' if we cannot master our focus.

Focus is our ability to keep the mind in an alert state of readiness. It's our ability to train our attention and to direct it at will. In an attention economy – an age of distraction – where everything's trying to steal our attention and take away our focus, it's our most precious resource when we are under pressure.

Every elite athlete needs a strong focus muscle, and an untrained mind tends to have a weak focus muscle. Players must train their minds to create focus, to refocus when distracted, and to maintain focus for the duration of their performance.

There are two main types of focus:

external and internal.

External focus is the ability to stay focused in the face of distractions like a bad referee's call, a hot day or booing from the crowd. Internal focus is the ability to have a quiet mind.

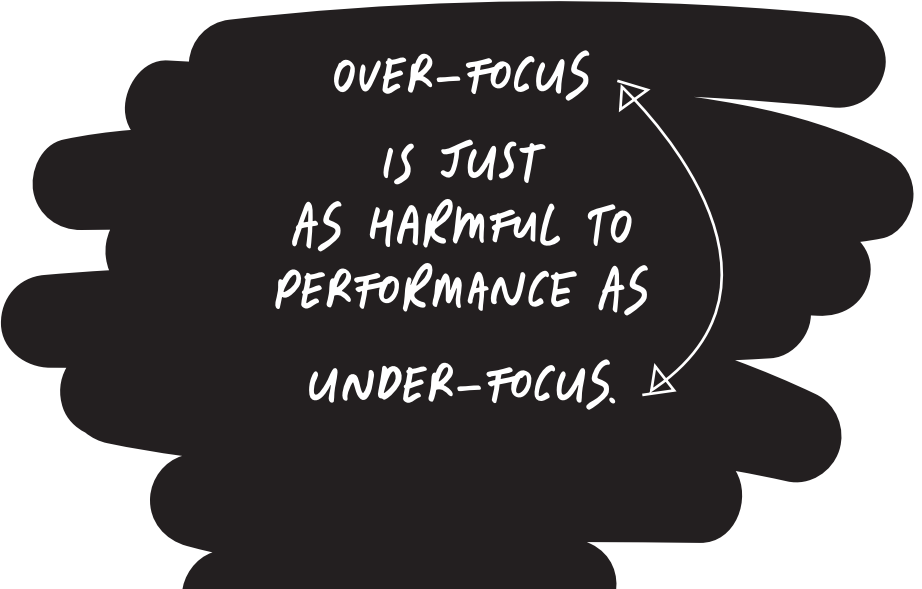
*THE BUSIER THE MIND, THE
LOWER THE PERFORMANCE.*

Focus is a balancing act, though. We are often familiar with what under-focus feels like. We're a bit vague, our thinking is foggy, we are easily distracted and our attention is dispersed.

Under-focus looks like the defender who ball-watches instead of tracking their player, the midfielder who's daydreaming when the ball comes their way, or the striker caught flat-footed because their mind wandered for three seconds. They're vague, easily distracted, and their attention is scattered across too many thoughts instead of locked onto their assignment.

What players aren't familiar with, in our experience, is over-focus. This occurs when we are trying too hard: we are fixated, our brow is furrowed and we are burning copious amounts of energy. The harder I try, we think, the better the outcome.

Over-focus is the striker so fixated on scoring they don't see the wide-open teammate, the quarterback staring down their primary receiver and getting picked off, or the basketball player trying so hard their jaw clenches, muscles tighten, and simple passes become difficult. The harder they try, the worse it gets.



OVER-FOCUS
IS JUST
AS HARMFUL TO
PERFORMANCE AS
UNDER-FOCUS.



ENERGY: THE CURRENCY OF HIGH PERFORMANCE

Energy is our ability to regulate our performance 'fuel'. Every athlete needs to be able to manage their energy effectively through an entire game. They must be efficient when needed, and explosive when desired.

Most coaches and players focus only on physical energy. What we are talking about is the use of mental energy. We all understand that our physical energy is influenced by what we eat, how fit our body is, how fit our heart is, what we drink and so on. Mental energy is the mind's capacity to perform the cognitive tasks our situation requires.

The mind controls the body, and this means the body will follow the mind. A dip in mental energy causes an immediate dip in physical energy. If the mind goes into low-performance mode, the physical energy of the body starts dropping rapidly. Remember, the brain is 2 per cent of our body weight, but uses 20 per cent of our resting energy. We see athletes exhaust themselves by burning all their mental energy in the lead-up to the game. By the time they run onto the field, they feel exhausted and wonder where all their energy has gone.

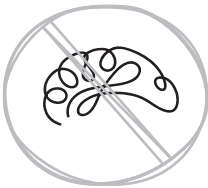
When a player is over-aroused – meaning they are above their optimal performance energy – their body is tense and tight, and there's too much energy in their system. They fumble and make mistakes. Alternatively, when they are under-aroused, they become sluggish and slow, they miss things and are half a step behind.

You see over-aroused players fumbling simple catches, throwing wild passes, rushing plays that need patience. Their footwork gets sloppy, their hands get hard, their timing goes off. They've got too much energy in their system – their engine is redlining, and all that extra juice makes them clumsy.

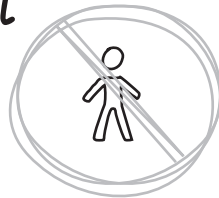
Under-aroused players look half-asleep. They're a step slow on defense, they miss the second effort, they let opportunities pass by. Watch their body language – shoulders slumped, no urgency, going through the motions. They've got the fitness – they're just running on mental fumes.

We have two energy levers: our ability to **up-regulate** and **down-regulate**.

Players must learn to effectively manage their energy equation, so they have the fuel to perform consistently and don't drop into energy troughs, or explode and waste it.



IF YOU CAN'T
CONTROL YOUR
MENTAL ENERGY,
YOU CAN'T CONTROL
YOUR PHYSICAL
ENERGY.



Otherwise, it's luck of the draw. It's like running on solar power on a cloudy day. They don't know if they'll have energy when they run out; they don't know whether it will last; they have no idea if it will collapse – and, if it does, how to get it back.

In a game situation, this manifests as energy troughs. A player might start slowly in the first five minutes, then their energy will return, only to collapse again at 15 minutes. Or they may be leading a race at the halfway point, and just seem to fade out. Their performance will be patchy, or might collapse for half or the whole game. Players don't feel in control of their energy when they're running onto the field, yet they haven't figured out why.

Did I overtrain? Did I not eat well enough? Did I not sleep well enough before the game? Why is this happening to me?

They never consider the one thing that impacts their consistency and energy through their entire performance: the mind.

WHAT KICKS YOU OUT OF THE PERFORMANCE ZONE?

Here's the reality: only about 60% of any game goes the way you want it to. The other 40%? That's chaos – controversial calls, crucial mistakes, hostile crowds, scoreboard pressure, physical fatigue, weather, injuries, teammates' errors, the bounce of the ball. The list is endless.

These moments spike stress beyond your bandwidth, and when that happens, you exit the Performance Zone and drop into one of the four low-performance mind states. The trigger doesn't determine your success – your reset speed does.

CONSISTENCY BUILDS SUCCESSFUL CAREERS AND SUCCESSFUL TEAMS

One critical point: you don't just visit one low-performance state per game. Players can move between all four states during a single performance. You might get agitated after a bad call, crash into self-criticism after making a mistake, then collapse into foggy overwhelm when the system overloads. Some athletes report experiencing all four states in one match.

You can also move in and out of the Performance Zone multiple times. The game isn't linear – neither is your mental performance. The key is developing the awareness to track where you are, moment to moment.

MENTAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW

This is where teams are missing a massive opportunity. After every game, coaches review physical performance, technical execution, and tactical decisions. But how often do they review mental performance? Almost never. Athletes don't

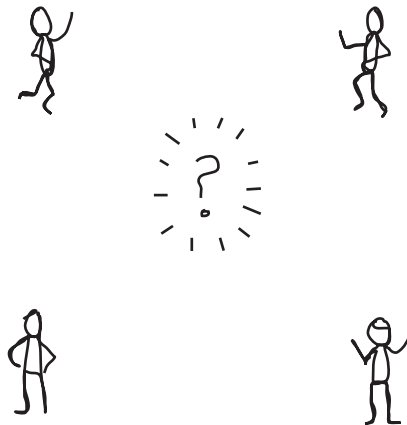
have the language or framework to debrief what happened in their minds during the game.

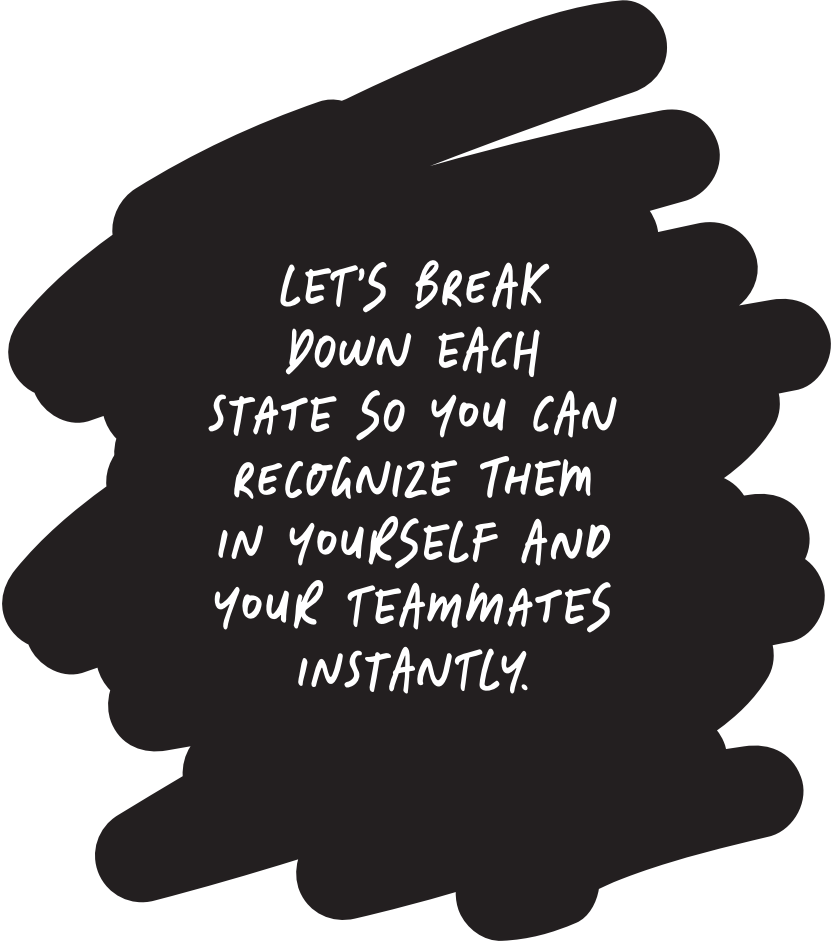
The Missing in Action Model gives teams that framework. Players can now track their mental performance retrospectively, just like reviewing game footage.

'I was in the Performance Zone for the first 15 minutes, went agitated after that penalty, reset well, then went critical on myself in the third quarter.'

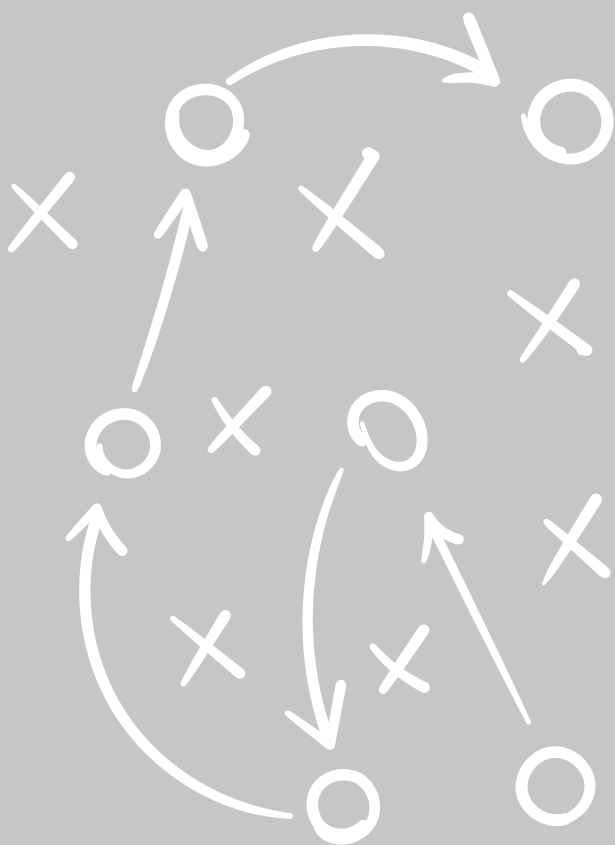
This level of awareness is a game-changer - you can't improve what you can't track.

Understanding these four mind states changes everything. When a player goes missing, you'll know exactly where they've gone - and more importantly, how to bring them back. Each state has unique characteristics, warning signs, and reset strategies.





LET'S BREAK
DOWN EACH
STATE SO YOU CAN
RECOGNIZE THEM
IN YOURSELF AND
YOUR TEAMMATES
INSTANTLY.



4TH QUARTER



*"The moment you
lose your head,
you lose the game."*

Sir Alex Ferguson

Manchester United Manager (1986-2013)

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CHAPTER 10

**THE FOUR
LOW-PERFORMANCE
MIND STATES**

Ferguson knew this better than most. Over decades of managing elite athletes under the highest pressure, he watched players go missing in action – not because they lacked talent or didn't care, but because their minds moved into a stress response they didn't know how to get out of. But here's what most people miss:

Not every player loses their head the same way.

Some blow up. Some shut down. Some drift off. Some collapse inward. When the pressure hits and a player blows their bandwidth, they don't all go to the same place.

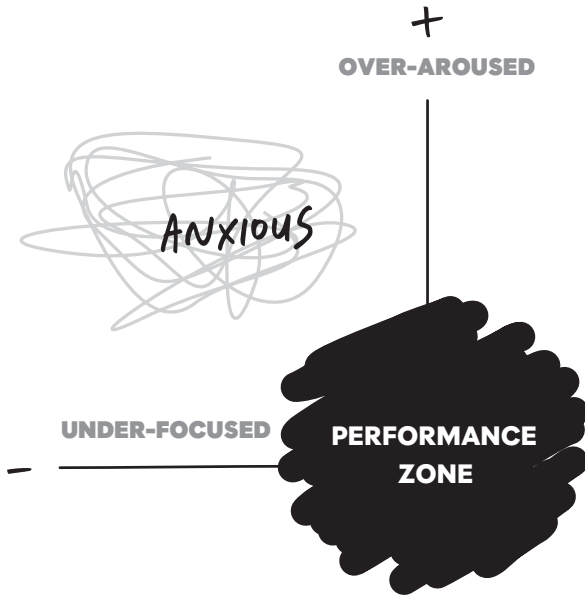
Each low-performance mind state looks different, feels different, and requires a different response to reset. That's what makes this model so powerful – it gives you the language to diagnose exactly where you've gone, so you can get back fast.

"I might appear locked in, but trust me there's a storm inside. And the biggest battle is always within."

- Novak Djokovic, 24-time Grand Slam Champion

Before we dive into each state, let's connect this back to the Stress Curve. When you blow your bandwidth and enter distress, you move into fight-or-flight. That's where Agitated and Anxious live – both over-aroused, but with different focus patterns. If the distress continues and you hit overwhelm, your system moves into what's called a 'flop' response – that's where Foggy shows up. Critical can appear anywhere along this curve, but it's distinct because all that energy and focus turns inward instead of outward.

THE ANXIOUS MIND



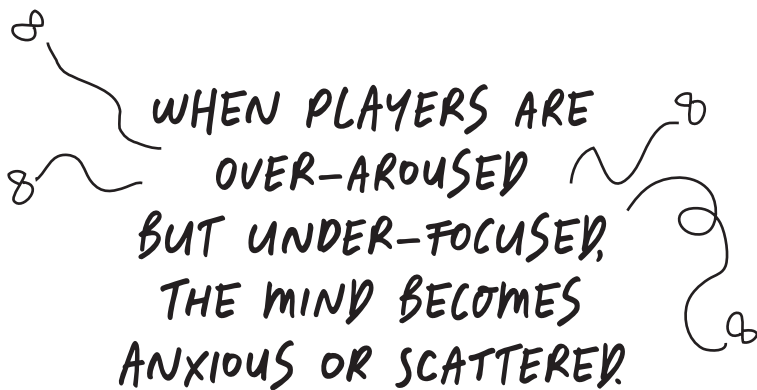
- The worrier.
- Fumbly, indecisive and looks overwhelmed.
- Lost in the mind, overthinks everything and stops playing their natural game.

'I didn't sleep a wink.'

- Greg Norman,
professional golfer

This is how Greg Norman described the night before the final round in his famous 1996 US Masters collapse. Instead of staying in the zone that had allowed him to play three great rounds of golf, his mind went missing even before he hit the first ball on day four.

An anxious player is highly distracted: they're over-focused on what's happening around them and under-focused on what they need to do to deliver.



WHEN PLAYERS ARE
OVER-AROUSSED
BUT UNDER-FOCUSED,
THE MIND BECOMES
ANXIOUS OR SCATTERED.

Like a swarm of butterflies, the busy mind has an inability to focus in any particular direction. The anxious player struggles to concentrate, instead flipping from one thing to another. They are highly prone to distraction – both internally, through

the busyness of their mind, and externally, through what's happening around them.

They are plagued by second-guessing and indecision, and unable to act with certainty and decisiveness. They start to fumble, their fine motor skills disappearing, and they get over-aroused. Their vision, rather than being over-focused, is dispersed; the game comes at them quickly, and their response time reduces rapidly. They are overthinking and over-analysing everything, trying desperately to control the situation.

The anxious mind is different to the agitated mind in that it's not focused on one thing. It's in a state of overwhelm. The player is swamped by the stimuli they are receiving. There's a high sense of arousal, but they turn this into a high state of anxiety due to what's happening in their mind.

Given the pressure of high-performance sport, we would vouch that most athletes are carrying a low to medium level of anxiety most of the time. That means their bandwidth for additional stress response is limited, and they're likely to go into overwhelm. Without training the mind, most players have very few tools for effectively reducing anxiety.

This anxiety can occur in the week leading up to the game. A player might get over-anxious about competing against a particular competitor. Or it might be a hot day when they play a winter sport. It might be that their pre-game routine gets disrupted, or they didn't bring the right boots, or the bus comes five minutes late. They get badly affected by the unexpected. They are uncomfortable with the unknown.

"The only way to greatness is by managing your way through pressure. If you're comfortable all the time, you'll never get the success you want. Top teams and individuals thrive outside of their comfort zones."

- Gilbert Enoka, leadership and mental skills coach
for the New Zealand All Blacks

STUCK IN THE FUTURE, DROWNING IN WHAT-IFS

The anxious player looks nervous in the dressing room before the game. Their eyes are darting everywhere. They look flighty, scared or uncertain. They are unable to focus their attention on themselves, and get distracted by everything around them.

What's everyone else doing?

What will the opposition do?

What will the weather be like?

What will the crowd be like?

What's the coach thinking?

What are my parents thinking?

What's the media thinking?

How am I going to perform today?

THEY LOOK FLIGHTY, SCARED OR UNCERTAIN.

This player is in a high state of anxiety, and worries constantly. Massive amounts of mental energy is lost, with very little return on investment. The mind trapped in the future, using our imagination to create a dark lens on what might happen.

They run onto the field looking jittery, and can't walk with confidence to their starting spot. You can see their legs shaking as they stand and sing the national anthem. They twitch and tremor as their bodies try to discharge some of the over-arousal in their body.

The game starts and they come charging into play, but they've got what is colloquially termed 'butterfingers'. They can't hold onto anything, and the ball slips through their hands again and again. Their fine motor skills have vanished. Their indecision is increasing.

They get the ball and don't know what to do with it. The game comes at them fast, and they look rushed in everything they do. They have neither poise nor composure. Even though the time and speed of the game hasn't changed, the pace of their mind has increased dramatically.

They lose vision: everything's happening so fast and they can't see the space. They can't see what will happen next, let alone four plays ahead. They struggle to see where their teammate is, or what they need to do. Indecision and anxiety plague them in every key moment where they need to execute something.

Their basic skills start to collapse. They make fundamental errors that they would never usually make. They act uncharacteristically. They forget the team structure, and their role within it. And even when they do remember, they make an absolute meal of it and end up giving the ball to the opposition.

Listen to what's running through their head:

What if I drop it again?

Everyone's watching. What's everyone going to think?

I'm so embarrassed. Don't mess this up. Just don't stuff it up.

Play it safe. Short pass. Don't take the risk.

What will the coach think?

What if I let them down again? I can't handle this.

The mind becomes a cage of what-ifs and worst-case scenarios. It's not just performance anxiety – it's the fear of other people's opinions, the terror of public failure, the catastrophizing of every possible outcome.

**NOW THEIR ANXIETY BECOMES
A SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY.**

What if?

One mistake causes another, making them even more anxious. They spiral deeper into a state of low performance.

Now the player starts to play conservatively. They look to reduce risk, and start taking the safe options to make sure that they don't stuff up again.

We call this taking the short kick. They stop taking the game on, and by playing it safe the team slips back inch-by-inch. Their impact is decreasing play by play, minute by minute. By avoiding taking healthy risks and being brave, they are offloading responsibility onto their teammates, who now must pick up the slack, adding pressure onto them.

Sometimes anxiety spreads throughout the team like a virus, causing other players to start doubting. To second guess themselves or each other. A team can get spooked, and a team-wide collapse starts to happen.

On the Stress Curve, the Anxious mind lives in the distress zone – flight response activated, cortisol spiking, bandwidth exceeded. The system is in survival mode, but the energy is scattered outward rather than focused.

The Mind Performance Profile predicts this pattern clearly.

- ➔ High Internal Distractibility means a busy mind with no off switch.
- ➔ Low Expectancy means they're programmed for pessimism before the game starts.
- ➔ Low Ability to Be Present keeps them trapped in the future.
- ➔ Low Ability to Risk and High Fear of Failure complete the picture.

If you see these scores in a player's profile, you know the anxious state is coming under pressure.

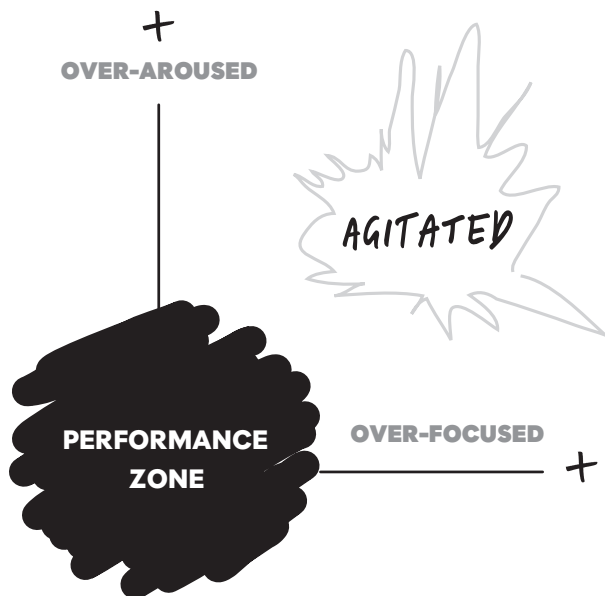
ANXIOUS MIND	
Stress response	Flight
Focus	Under-focused, low duration of focus
Energy	Over-aroused, high nerves, rapidly draining
Mind	Externally focused, threat-orientated, worried, scattered, stuck in the future
Breath	Short, agitated
Body	Tense muscles, fatigues quickly
Self-talk	Noisy, negative, catastrophising
Behaviours	Edgy, uncertain, second-guessing, eyes darting, leg twitching, lacking confidence
Motor skills	Clumsy, inaccurate, lacking fluidity
Vision	Near-sighted, high alert for immediate threat
Voice	Can be pessimistic
Connectivity	Externally focused, not connected to self or team
Common Triggers	Pre-game pressure, opponent reputation, scoreboard pressure, past failures in similar situations, high expectations

SOMETIMES THAT
ANXIETY DOESN'T STAY
SCATTERED AND INTERNAL.

WHEN SOMETHING GOES
WRONG – A MISTAKE,
A BAD CALL, AN
OPPONENT'S SLEDGE
– ALL THAT NERVOUS
ENERGY CAN
EXPLODE OUTWARD.

THE WORRIER BECOMES
THE HOTHEAD.

AGITATED MIND



- The hothead who can't control their anger.
- The game moves on, the body moves on, but the head is stuck in the past.
- They over-try and make more mistakes.

*"Dreadful, Zidane's headbutt on
Materazzi was dreadful... F***!
Zidane headbutted Materazzi.
When you see the video
you will not believe me."*

Luis Medina Cantalejo
World Cup Final referee

Who could forget this infamous moment in the 2006 Football World Cup Final between France and Italy.

Ten minutes remaining in extra-time. The match tied at 1-1. The French captain, in a moment of seeing red, headbutted Materazzi in the chest and was sent off. Italy goes on to win on penalties in extra time and claim their fourth World Cup title.

Listen to referee Luis Medina Cantalejo's commentary: he's in complete disbelief over what he just witnessed. But what he can't see – what nobody watching can see – is what's actually happening inside Zidane's mind.

This wasn't about Zidane's personality or character – it's about what happens to any brain under extreme pressure when it hasn't been trained to reset. He'd gone agitated – stuck in the past, unable to let go of what Materazzi said, fighting a battle that had nothing to do with winning the World Cup.

We all know the hothead, and we've all seen the cost of losing your head. An agitated player's energy has become over-aroused, and they've become over-focused. On television, we see the athlete losing their cool, blowing their top, and cursing at the referee, at themselves or at another player.

They're prone to anger, they're over-focused on what happened and they can't let it go. They're in a high state of resistance – the lowest level of resilience. Their body becomes tight. Their breathing becomes agitated. Their focus has narrowed, and they're losing sight of the game.

The cohesion of their mind deteriorates as they over-focus on the small things and struggle to see the big picture of the game. They try too hard to make up for what happened. This person is likely to keep making mistakes. Instead of making the right play, they'll try to win the game on the next play.

STUCK IN THE PAST, UNABLE TO ACCEPT

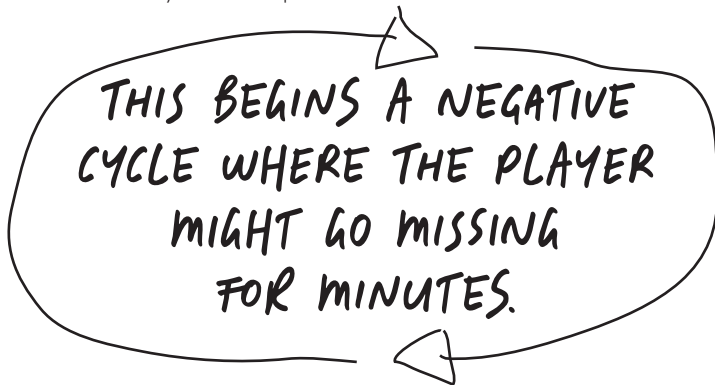
Many things can set off an agitated mind: a referee's call, sledging, the crowd, the scoreboard, making a mistake, a teammate making a mistake. All these things are part of the game, but in the moment the player is unable to accept what's happened. It shouldn't be like this, they think, and they want the past to change. But whenever you argue with reality, all you get is suffering.

Think of a football match. The player is running around, active in the game and full of energy. Suddenly the referee blows a penalty against them. In exasperation, they throw their arms up in the air. They punch their hand and start swearing and cursing. They are reacting to the indignity of what has happened to them. To a spectator, it looks like they are the most hard-done-by person on the planet.

Meanwhile, the play continues. The referee has blown the penalty and the opposition is moving forward, but the agitated player still has the penalty in their mind. They're still complaining to the referee. Never in the history of arguing with a referee has it changed the call.

Now the agitated player is effectively out of the game, and it's as plain as day to everyone. There's a look in their eyes that seems to say: I'm going to get my own back. I'm going to make up for it on the next play.

The next play comes around and they come charging in. Their energy explodes, they're out of control, and they give away another penalty. This sends them further into an agitated, angry, explosive state. Cursing and yelling, they run back. The referee might even blow another penalty against them because they can't keep their mouth shut.



Lost in anger, unable to control their energy – suddenly they seem like they have the temperament of a two-year-old. Their vision narrows, and they're thinking only of themselves. They've lost connection with their teammates, and they've taken the entire situation personally.

In the next five minutes, the player starts over-trying. They over-focus and push their body harder.

All their skill and talent starts breaking down because of this overexertion. Their fine motor skills become erratic. The smooth catch or the clean pick-up becomes a dropped ball or a fumble. An easy scoring opportunity gets wasted because, physiologically, the player is over-aroused. They have lost the ability to control themselves.

Ten minutes later, their mind is still stuck in the past, back when the referee made the call. They are obsessing about what happened, and unable to accept that the referee's call was 'just part of the game'.

Here's what nobody tells you about the agitated mind: it's powered by resistance.

The player has decided that what just happened shouldn't have happened. The ref's call was wrong. The opponent's sledge was unfair. The bounce of the ball wasn't right. They're arguing with reality – and when you argue with reality, you lose 100% of the time.

The internal voice sounds like this:

I can't believe the ref made that call! That's bullshit! He shouldn't have done that! How is that a penalty? I'll show them. I'll make up for it right now. They can't do that to me!

All external. All resistance. All focused on what shouldn't be happening instead of what needs to happen next.

While this internal argument is raging, the game keeps moving. The opposition takes advantage. Teammates compensate.

And the agitated player is still stuck in what happened five minutes ago, burning energy, making mistakes, and digging themselves deeper.

When you resist something, you want the whole world to change. You are unwilling to change yourself.

A player with an agitated mind has one foot on the accelerator and one foot on the brake, burning copious amounts of energy and going nowhere. Until they shift from resistance to acceptance of the situation, they'll stay in this low-performance state.

On the Stress Curve, the Agitated mind also lives in the distress zone – but in fight mode. Same biology as the anxious state, but the energy is directed outward at a single target rather than scattered everywhere.

The Mind Performance Profile flags this player early.

- Performance Energy above Optimal Energy means they're wound up before the whistle blows.
- Low Ability to Calm means they have no mechanism to bring themselves down.
- Low Emotional Regulation and Low Responsibility create the reactive, blame-shifting pattern.
- The one asset? High Ability to Fight.

That fire is real – it just needs direction.

AGITATED MIND	
Stress response	Fight
Focus	Over-focused
Energy	Over-aroused, uncontrolled
Mind	Externally focussed, resistant, stuck in the past
Breath	Fast and shallow, chest
Body	High muscular tension
Self-talk	Aggressive, critical of others
Behaviours	Anger, complaining, arguing, blaming, reacting, lacking patience, resisting, over-trying
Motor skills	Fine motor skills diminish, accuracy becomes erratic
Vision	Narrow, reduced spatial awareness
Voice	Loud and vocal
Connectivity	Disconnecting, selfish
Common Triggers	Referee decisions, opponent sledging, teammate errors, perceived injustice, things beyond control

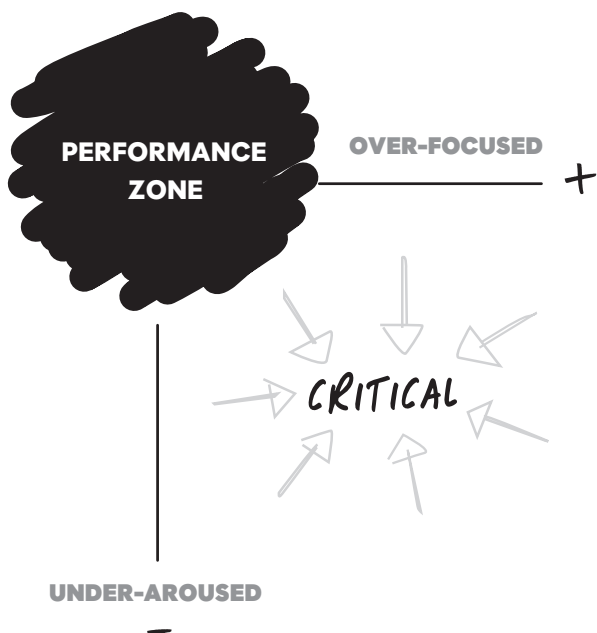
NOT EVERYONE STAYS
STUCK IN THAT
EXTERNAL FIGHT.

SOME PLAYERS' ANGER
BURNS HOT BUT BRIEF,
THEN TURNS INWARD.

THEY STOP FIGHTING
THE REF OR THE
OPPONENT AND START
FIGHTING THEMSELVES.

THE EXPLOSION BECOMES
AN IMPLOSION AND THE
WAR NOW IS WITHIN.

THE CRITICAL MIND



- The over-critical perfectionist.
- Focus, energy and body collapses.
- Goes internal, withdraws from others and isolates.

*'Make sure your worst
enemy doesn't live between
your own two ears.'*

- Laird Hamilton, big wave surfer

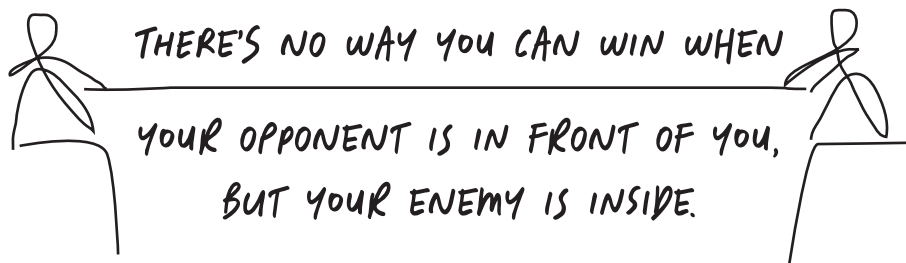
Nowhere demands greater self-belief than dropping onto a 50-foot monster wave that could end your life in seconds. For Hamilton, every word that he says to himself leading up to, and right before that moment, could mean his life or could write his surfing legacy.

The way we talk to ourselves is critical in any high-performance environment, and for far too many athletes their worst enemy lives between their own two ears.

The critical player has turned all their focus inward – but it's not the healthy internal focus of concentration. It's an obsessive, destructive over-focus on every mistake, every flaw, every failure. Their energy collapses as they spiral deeper into self-punishment. While the agitated player projects their frustration outward at refs and opponents, the critical player aims all that fire directly at themselves.

Instead of fighting the battle out there, they're fighting a battle that is raging on the inside, where no one can see it.

The athlete turns on themselves and gives in to self-punishment, usually over something that has happened. They become hyper-critical of what they did or didn't do, and of what's happening. They internalize every issue in the game.



Their self-talk becomes very negative. It's their inner critic who's come out to haunt them. Self-talk involves nasty words, it's attack thoughts: *'I can't f***ing believe you did that. That's f***ing pathetic! You always do that. I can't believe you did it again. You always f*** it up!'*

Listen to what's playing on repeat in their head:

*You f***ing idiot. You always do this. You're pathetic. Why did they even pick you? You don't deserve to be out here. You're letting everyone down. You're shit. Always have been. Look at you, you can't do anything right.**

The critical player doesn't just acknowledge mistakes – they weaponize them. Every error becomes evidence of their worthlessness. And the more they beat themselves up, the more their confidence collapses, which leads to more mistakes, which feeds the cycle.

The critical mind state is unique – it's both fight and flight happening at the same time, but turned inward. The fight shows up in the aggressive self-attack, the harsh internal voice, the relentless self-punishment. The flight shows up in the withdrawal from teammates, the isolation, the pulling away from the game. They're simultaneously battling themselves and fleeing from everyone else.

Most people engage in negative self-talk to some degree at times in their life, some worse than others. For some it's a never ending war. We will often say things to ourselves that we'd never say to anyone else. When we hear those words said back to us, we'll often laugh at them because they sound so ridiculous, so unbelievable.

It's a fictitious nightmare in the prison of our own mind.

When the 'not good enough' self-talk script is activated, a player will do everything they can to self-protect, rather than risk further ridicule. They'll play within themselves, they'll be half-hearted, they may even want to give up.

The battle is lost, and a shot hasn't been fired.

*"If there's no enemy within,
the enemy outside can
do us no harm."*

- African proverb

STUCK IN YOUR HEAD, BATTLING YOURSELF

You can expect to see very negative self-talk in the athlete with a critical mind state. You may even hear them speaking to themselves: *'Why the hell did you do that? You idiot. You stupid idiot - you always do that! You f***ed it up again. Why are you even out here? What's the coach thinking? He's probably going to pull you off the field because you keep stuffing up.'**

To everyone watching on, this player looks like they've disappeared into their own world. Their brow is furrowed. You see them drop their head and slump their shoulders. Their energy is collapsing and their confidence is plummeting. They've become their own worst enemy.

Unlike the agitated player, who is externalising everything and arguing with the referee or a teammate, this player is internalising and arguing with themselves.

While this argument is going on, of course, the game's still running at a million miles an hour – but the player is lost in their own world. They bring this state to the next play and act like they're dragging a ball and chain. The whole time, their inner voice is saying: *You're not good enough. You're not going to make this.*

A critical mind results in a drop in risk-taking. The player starts to look disheartened. Why bother? Don't do that again. They start to hide from the play, and their performance can collapse within seconds. They'll take the short kick or the short pass, they'll play it safe and play within themselves. They hope the ball doesn't come to them. What they'd really like to do is walk off the ground and collapse in a corner.

Their half-heartedness grows. You see them lining up to kick at goal, and there's no belief in their eyes. There's no self-confidence either, just an expectation that things won't end well. They have already proven to themselves that they're a failure, so it's clear they will fail at this too.

And if they do miss the goal, their inner voice utters: *You see? I told you so. You're no good. You're shit! You do this all the*

time. The player can become so self-critical that they will tell a teammate to f*** off if they try to offer support.

They've created a prison of their own design, and now they start to think, poor me! They tell themselves they're the victim. They almost look to create the next mistake in order to prove themselves wrong, to beat themselves up about it. It's like a self-fulfilling prophecy.

At half time, this player sits in the corner, head between their knees. They won't communicate, they won't look up. They won't listen to coaches or their teammates, and they can't pull themselves out of the negative mind state. Their internal narrative is so loud that external voices can't break in. They'll simply grunt and say they are okay.

We see a player who just wants to go home.

On the Stress Curve, the Critical mind can appear anywhere from distress through to early overwhelm. The fight-flight energy has turned inward. The athlete is simultaneously attacking themselves and withdrawing from the game.

In the Mind Performance Profile, this player shows

- ➔ High Internal Distractibility - a mind that won't quiet down.
- ➔ Low Self Concept and Low Self Talk mean the internal dialogue is relentless and destructive.
- ➔ Low Situational Focus explains the inconsistency.
- ➔ And Low Ability to Reset keeps them trapped in the spiral.

Every one of these is a trainable skill.

CRITICAL MIND	
Stress response	Fight/Flight
Focus	Over-focused
Energy	Under-aroused, low and heavy
Mind	Internally focused, negative
Breath	Heavy, sighing
Body	Posture collapses, contracts, loss of strength
Self-talk	Highly self-critical, sometimes critical of others
Behaviours	Looks disheartened, drags feet, dwells on mistakes, stops taking risks, low confidence, disconnects
Motor skills	Slow, lacking impact, active but conservative
Vision	Narrow, over-focused on self
Voice	Quiet to none, unless criticizing another
Connectivity	Disconnected and isolated

NOT EVERY PLAYER STAYS TRAPPED
IN THAT INTERNAL WAR.

SOMETIMES THE SELF-ATTACK BURNS
SO HOT FOR SO LONG THAT THE
SYSTEM SIMPLY CAN'T SUSTAIN IT.

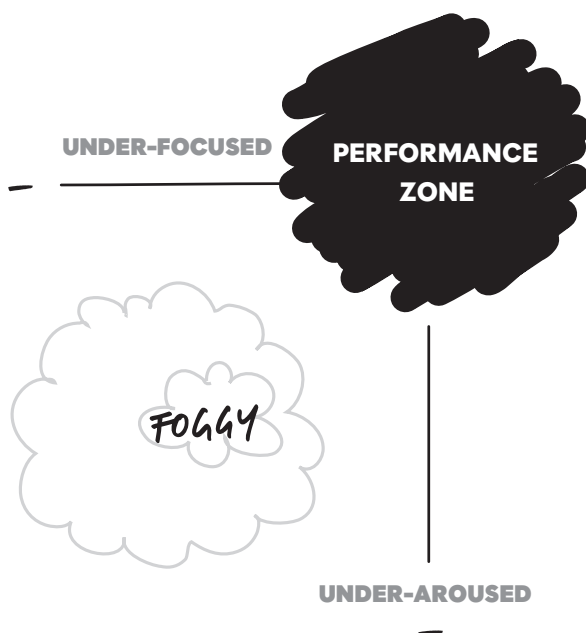
THE CRITICAL MIND EXHAUSTS ITSELF.

THE HARSH INNER VOICE DOESN'T STOP
– IT JUST FADES TO STATIC.

THE FIGHT GOES OUT OF THEM
ENTIRELY, AND WHAT'S LEFT ISN'T
ANGER OR SELF-PUNISHMENT.

IT'S NOTHING. THE LIGHTS GO OUT,
AND THE PLAYER DRIFTS INTO A FOG.

THE FOGGY MIND



- The deer in the headlights.
- On the field, but having no impact.
- Floating, spectating and ball-watching.

'I think there needs to be an investigation, to be quite honest with you. He looks like he was drugged out there, for crying out loud. Literally comatose. I don't know who the hell that was playing for the Houston Rockets, but it wasn't the James Harden I've been watching all year.'

- Stephen A. Smith, ESPN reporter

Half joking, half serious, NBA commentator Stephen A. Smith grappled to make sense of the no-show he was seeing from Houston Rockets superstar James Harden, arguably the most lethal scorer in the NBA. In the season ending Game 6 loss to the San Antonio Spurs, Harden didn't attempt a shot until late in the first half, looked totally disinterested, kept deferring to teammates, and finished with 10 points on 2-for-11 shooting and six turnovers before fouling out. He looked a million miles away.

A foggy athlete is running around in a daze, unable to focus and losing energy rapidly. Everything feels difficult.

Classically, this is the 'ball-watcher' or the 'floater'. They're out there, running around and looking like they're in the game, but they're completely ineffectual and have no impact. Either they're following the game like a lost dog, or they've completely floated away and are checking out something random in the stadium. Their mind has become overwhelmed by a build-up of stress, and they're at risk of missing not just the moment, but the whole game!

The foggy mind starts to check out. It's not present; rather, it's outside itself, looking back.

It's not easy for a player to recognize when they're in a fog, but it's obvious to everyone else. They could be in a fog for up to 15 minutes without realising it. Their performance metrics are plummeting and yet they're only vaguely aware of what's happening.

From a physical perspective, a player with a foggy mind can feel their energy dropping. They feel heavy, and they find it hard to focus on where to go next. They struggle to read the game and lose any sense of instinct. They feel half a step slower. They lack energy and everything is an effort. It's like running with lead in your boots.

From the Stress Curve perspective, this is what overwhelm looks like when it shifts toward immobilization. The system hasn't completely frozen – that's the extreme trauma response we rarely see in sport – but it's shutting down. Blood flow to the thinking brain drops. Processing speed slows. The body shifts into conservation mode because it can't sustain the load anymore.

The foggy mind state is the hardest to feel coming on. It's difficult to pinpoint the triggers because generally a range of stressors have built up. The player just knows they're 'not right'. Often, it's an end state that is preceded by an anxious or self-critical state. I became self-critical then got lost in a fog. I started to freak out about the result and then it was over... So the mind is triggered into overwhelm, just before it fades out.

Remember the Stress Curve? The foggy state sits in that overwhelm zone – where stressors have been prolonged for

too long and the system starts to immobilize. Scientists call this the 'flop' response – the stage where overwhelm begins shifting toward immobilization. It's not the full freeze response you see in extreme trauma – that's rare in sport. It's the stage before that, where your brain and body start shutting down to protect themselves from further damage.

You might get here from burning out after prolonged anxiety, collapsing after explosive anger, or spiraling down after relentless self-criticism. Any of the other mind states, if they run long enough, can lead here. The fog is your brain's last-ditch attempt to protect itself by pulling the emergency brake before complete collapse.

Think of it through the lens of allostatic load – the 'buy now, pay later' of stress. They've been carrying high cortisol for days or weeks. Maybe they've been anxious in the lead-up, maybe they've been in other mind states during competition, maybe they've been ingesting too much content – social media, news, analysis – building cognitive load. The fog is the bill coming due. The system can't sustain the load anymore, so it pulls the plug.

STUCK IN A FOG, DRIFTING AWAY

The foggy player looks lost. When you look into their eyes, they're just not there – they return a thousand-yard stare. Their energy and focus have collapsed to the point where there's a body there, but there's nobody home. As a coach, you could tell them anything at half time in the dressing room – *'Ok guys, what we need out there is a bucket of chicken and a two-liter bottle of Coke'* – and they'll simply nod their head.

Their eye contact is poor. They're looking down rather than up. Their voice is quiet, and they're not communicating with their teammates. They don't have any sense of how greatly their state is impacting their performance.

FOR A FOGGY PLAYER, THE GAME IS OVER BEFORE IT BEGINS.

They'll reflect on the match and barely remember anything. They have a sense that they weren't even there. They don't know what happened. They don't know what they did. They only snap out of the fog with the final siren, then they look to the scoreboard to see if they won or lost.

The fog becomes a performance killer: instead of having a full team in the game, you've got 75 per cent performing and 25 per cent as passengers, simply taking up space.

Often there isn't any coherent self-talk happening at all. The mind just... drifts. One player described it perfectly: *'I found myself staring at the fan sitting in the sixth row with the missing tooth. I hadn't even realized I'd drifted off.'*

It's like daydreaming in the middle of battle. Mental overwhelm sends them into the thousand-yard stare and they vague out completely. If there are thoughts, they're random, disconnected, slow: *...that cloud looks weird... where am I supposed to be?... this feels heavy... when does this end?...*

Here's what makes it worse: the foggy state looks like the

player doesn't care. Coaches see disinterest. Teammates see someone who's checked out. The character assassination begins: 'They didn't want it enough. They're not committed. They just don't care.'

It can be intensely frustrating for the coach: '*What the f** are you doing out there? You're just standing there and watching. Go and get them! Do something! Do anything but what you're doing. You're just standing there. You might as well be sitting in the 12th row, having a beer and watching the game, because you'd be about as effective as you are at the moment!*'*

What the coach doesn't realize is that the player has gone into a stress response - they've been overwhelmed, and their entire system, including their brain, is shutting down. The player usually has no idea it's happened, and no idea how to get themselves out of it.

On the Stress Curve, the Foggy mind lives in the overwhelm zone - the flop response where the system begins shutting down. This is often the end state after prolonged time in other mind states. The bill comes due, and the brain pulls the plug.

The Mind Performance Profile reveals the foggy player through

- Low Ability to Focus and Low Duration of Focus - they can't lock in and can't sustain it.
- Low Ability to Energize means they start flat and can't raise themselves.
- Low Ability to Recover means their system isn't restoring between performances.

The fog is predictable when you know what to look for.

FOGGY MIND	
Stress response	Overwhelm (early Freeze)
Focus	Under-focused
Energy	Under-aroused, heavy, drained
Mind	Blank, dazed, can't remember anything
Breath	Laboured
Body	Collapsed posture, high fatigue
Self-talk	Can be very quiet internally.
Behaviours	Spectating, floating, active but having no impact, lacks initiative, disengages, slow
Motor skills	Sluggish, half a step behind the play
Vision	Vague, ball-watching, scoreboard-watching
Voice	Quiet
Connectivity	Disconnected, unaware of others
Common Triggers	Sustained time in other mind states, allostatic load buildup, excessive cognitive load, prolonged time in competition

Remember the numbers from Chapter 2. If 25 per cent of your team is checked out, that's 25 per cent of your salary cap contributing nothing. For an NFL team, that's nearly \$70 million going missing.

Now you've seen all four states – the anxious worrier drowning in what-ifs, the agitated hothead stuck in the past, the critical perfectionist at war with themselves, and the foggy floater drifting through the game like a ghost. Four different destinations, but the same root cause: a mind that hasn't been trained to recognize where it's gone and get itself back.

THE POWER OF SELF-LEADERSHIP

We are identifying and exploring these mind states with players so that they know where they've gone missing. It's an objective analysis. It's not personal. Coaches and athletes have seen these signs and behavioral traits for generations. They just haven't known what they meant, or what to do about them.

The ability to self-diagnose is a critical first step in the process of being able to rapidly reset.

There are two key aspects of this.

Firstly, it's about knowing the early warning signs, and the mind state that you're heading for. Often, if we're aware of these early warning signs, we can circumvent checking out entirely, or experience a micro checkout rather than a macro checkout.

If we do go into a stress response, the second step is being able to get out of those mind states rapidly.

Most players have an Achilles heel – a default mind state they'll

fall into under pressure if they haven't trained their mind.

If you're naturally intense and competitive, you'll likely go agitated. If you're a worrier, anxiety hits first. Perfectionists often crash straight into critical. And if you're carrying high stress loads before the game even starts, fog becomes your frequent visitor.

But here's what's critical to understand: you can move between states during competition.

You might start anxious in the warm-up, blow up agitated after a bad call, then collapse into fog or critical by half-time. Recognizing your patterns – both your default state and your cascades – is the first step to breaking the cycle.

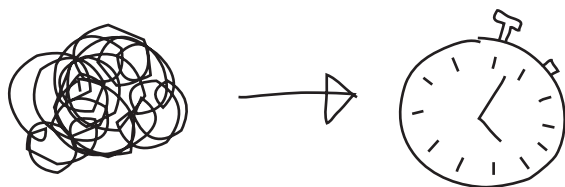
There's one more thing you need to know: it's almost always easier to spot these states in others than in yourself.

Coaches can see the fog in their player's eyes, the tension in their shoulders, the defeat in their body language. Teammates can see when someone's gone missing. But when you're in it, you're blind to it.

That's why great teams don't just train individuals to self-diagnose; they train everyone – coaches and athletes alike – to recognize the signs and help pull each other back before they go too deep.

Now you know the four states. You know what they look like, how they feel, what drives them. But knowing where you've gone isn't enough – you need to know how to get back. Fast. That's where the Rapid Reset comes in.

IT'S A BATTLE-
TESTED TOOL
DESIGNED TO PULL
YOU OUT OF ANY
OF THESE MIND
STATES IN SECONDS,
RIGHT IN THE HEAT
OF COMPETITION.



"Mistakes are going to happen. There's no avoiding that. Just make sure that doesn't kill your confidence or change the way you play."

Stephen Curry

4x NBA Champion



CHAPTER 11

RAPID RESET

That's the reality of high performance. It doesn't matter how talented you are, how hard you've trained, or how well you've prepared – at some point, you're going to go missing. The pressure will spike, the moment will overwhelm you, and you'll find yourself in one of those four low-performance mind states we mapped in the last chapter.

The question isn't **IF** you'll go missing.

The question is:

HOW FAST CAN YOU GET BACK?

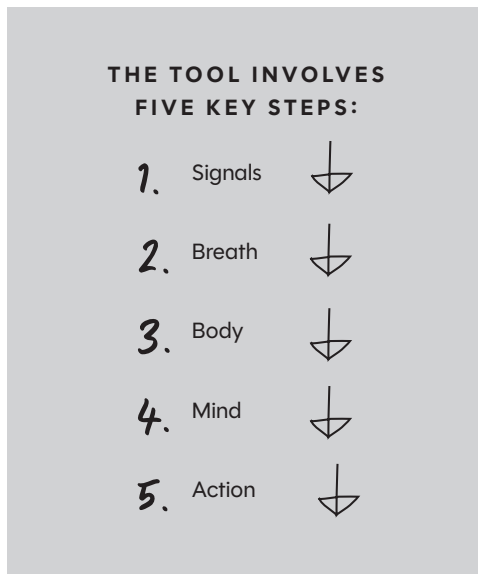
In elite sport, seconds decide everything. Not minutes. Seconds. Ten seconds of mental absence can be the difference between a championship and a career haunted by "what if." We've spent this entire book examining the cost of moments – how a single play, a single decision, a single mental lapse can define a legacy. The stakes couldn't be higher.

Think about it. A Formula 1 race can be decided by thousandths of a second. An NFL game turns on a single play. A tennis match pivots on two or three points. When the margins are this thin, you can't afford to be unavailable to the moment. You can't wait for your head to clear, for your nerves to settle, for the game to slow down. By the time you naturally recover, the moment that mattered is already gone.

That's what separates the good from the great. Good athletes eventually recover – maybe by the next play, the next point, the next shift. Great athletes have trained themselves to reset in seconds, sometimes even while the play is still unfolding. They don't wait for the moment to pass. They have a tool. They have a way out.

Rapid Reset is one of the foundational mental tools in our training system. It's typically the first tool we teach athletes and teams because it addresses something immediate and tangible: the **Ability to Reset**, one of the 30 mental skills we measure in the Mental Performance Profile.

While we have a full suite of tools designed to lift performance across every dimension of the profile – focus, decision-making, confidence, competitiveness, and more – Rapid Reset is where most athletes see their fastest improvement. Why? Because it gives them something they can use today, in the heat of competition, when everything's on the line.



Master these five steps, and you can reset your nervous system and reorient your mind in **under ten seconds**.

We've watched athletes use this to shift their state between plays, between points, even between pitches. This is your insurance policy against the moments that haunt careers. This is how you ensure you're available when it matters most.

EVERYTHING BEGINS WITH AWARENESS

You can't reset what you don't notice.

This sounds obvious, but it's where most athletes fail. They're so caught up in the game, in the pressure, in their own heads, that they don't realize they've gone missing until it's too late.

The best athletes develop what we call "dual awareness." They can be fully engaged in competition while simultaneously monitoring their internal state. They know when they're drifting toward agitated. They catch themselves before they slide into foggy. They sense the early signs of anxious before it grips them.



AWARENESS IS A
TRAINED SKILL,
NOT A NATURAL
TALENT.

At the 2024 Paris Olympics, Simone Biles had a shaky moment on bars during the all-around final. With beam next, she recognized in real time that she needed to regulate before stepping onto the apparatus. 'I knew if I didn't regulate my emotions and my anxiety in that moment heading to beam, then it could potentially not go the way I wanted it to,' she said afterwards. She won gold. That's a trained reset in action – on the biggest stage in world sport.

*'You have to be able to know
the moment when things are
going well and things are going
bad, and be aware of yourself.
Self-awareness is huge.'*

- Stephen Curry, 4x NBA Champion

Start by understanding the four mind states from Chapter 9. Each one has a distinct feel, a particular set of warning signs, specific thoughts and behaviors that show up. You need to know your own patterns. *Where do you go under pressure? What does it feel like in your body? What thoughts run through your mind?*

Remember the Stress Curve from Chapter 7? When pressure hits, you move along that curve – sometimes into high performance, sometimes into low performance. The four mind states we mapped show where you go when you blow through your bandwidth.

Most athletes have never had a framework to understand where their mind goes under pressure. They just know something went wrong. But once you see the model, it becomes clear. You recognize yourself immediately.

"That's me – I go agitated when things don't go my way." Or "I'm the one who goes quiet and anxious before big moments." Or "I check out and go foggy when I'm overwhelmed."

The clarity is instant because the model speaks the language of the dressing room, not the psychology textbook.

You've lived these states. You've watched your teammates go there. Now you have names for them. And once you can name them, you can catch them. And if you catch it early, you can reset it fast.

**THE QUICKER YOU CATCH
YOURSELF GOING MISSING,
THE FASTER YOU
CAN GET BACK.**

WHAT YOU CAN EXPLORE:

Think about your last high-pressure performance. Which mind state did you go to? What were the first signs? What did you feel in your body? What thoughts showed up?

Most athletes find they have a primary mind state they go to under pressure, and sometimes a secondary one when things get really intense. Start mapping your patterns.

Watch your teammates. Which mind state do they go to under pressure? You'll start to see it clearly once you know what to look for. The agitated player who can't settle. The anxious player who goes quiet. The foggy player who seems to drift. The critical player who beats themselves up.

Recognition is the first step to helping them - and yourself.





STEP 1: SIGNALS (EARLY WARNING SIGNS)

Every athlete has a stress signature – a unique pattern of physical, mental, and emotional signals that show up when they start to go missing. These signals are your early warning system. Learn to read them, and you can intervene before you're deep in the hole.

The problem is, most athletes don't pay attention to the signals until they're already drowning. By then, the signals have amplified into full-blown stress responses that are much harder to reverse. The key is catching them early, when they're still whispers rather than screams.

Here's what we've observed working with thousands of athletes: the physical signals usually show up first, often 30 to 60 seconds before you're consciously aware something's wrong.

**YOUR BODY KNOWS
BEFORE YOUR BRAIN DOES.**

Remember, the body reveals the mind, and it's sending you signals all the time. Without training, these signals are often missed. You need to become attuned to the cues of your

body, breath, mind, voice and energy. And the faster you become aware, the faster you can get back again.

Remember from Chapter 7: each of us has a range of signals that will fire, warning us (and others) that things are about to go bad. These signs are like the engine light coming on. There's something wrong with the system and you need to attend to it right now. Yet many of us ignore the signs and blow straight through our bandwidth.



AGITATED	ANXIOUS	FOGGY	CRITICAL
Physical Signals			
Shallow, rapid breathing	Butterflies or knots in stomach	Heavy limbs, low energy	Tight jaw or grinding teeth
Tension in jaw, shoulders, fists	Cold hands or feet	Slow movements	Rigid posture
Fidgeting, pacing, unable to stand still	Shaky legs or hands	Yawning or shallow breathing	Crossed arms
Racing heart rate	Dry mouth	Glazed look in eyes	Tension headaches
Flushed face or feeling hot	Butterflies in stomach	Slumped posture	Clenched fists
Tight chest	Muscle tension with low energy	Physical disconnection	Looking down or away

AGITATED	ANXIOUS	FOGGY	CRITICAL
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Mental Signals

Rapid-fire thoughts jumping between topics	Catastrophic thinking about outcomes	Difficulty making decisions	Harsh self-judgment
Inability to let things go	Doubt about abilities	Can't remember the game plan	Comparison to others
Anger at teammates, opponents, officials	Replaying past failures	Everything feels slow or distant	Perfectionist standards

Emotional Signals

Anger	Fear	Apathy	Shame
Frustration	Worry	Detachment	Guilt
Irritation	Panic	Numbness	Embarrassment
Rage	Dread	Resignation	Self-loathing

Behavioral Signals

Arguing with officials or teammates	Avoiding eye contact	Going through the motions	Negative self-talk (visible or audible)
Slamming equipment	Hesitating or freezing	Slow to react	Head down, shoulders slumped
Aggressive body language	Over-checking or seeking reassurance	Missing assignments	Avoiding challenges
Making rash decisions	Playing it too safe	Low effort or intensity	Giving up easily
Taking unnecessary risks	Withdrawing from teammates	Checked out between plays	Isolating from team

Elite athletes learn to recognize their top three to five signals – the ones that reliably predict their stress response. These become their personal alarm system. When they notice even one of these signals, they know it's time to intervene.

Your signals are speaking.

The question is: are you listening?

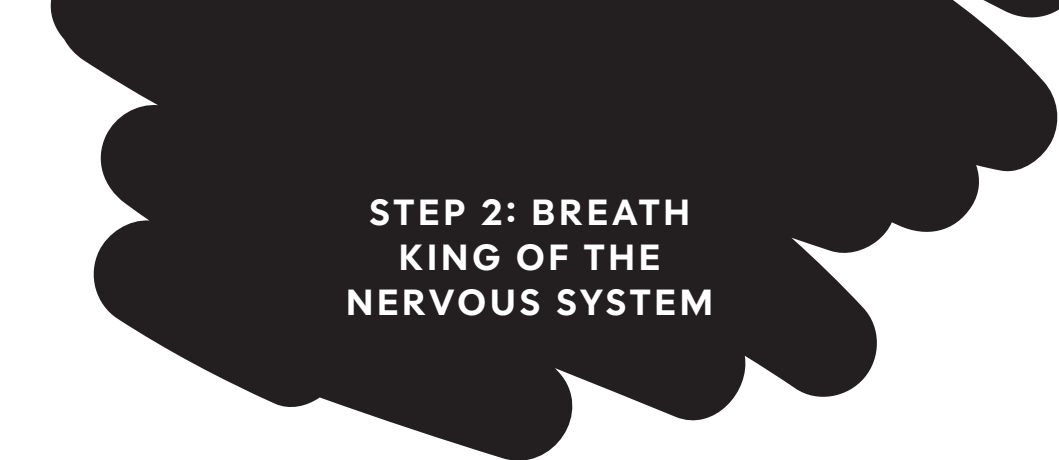
WHAT YOU CAN EXPLORE:

Pick your next training session or competition. Before you start, identify what you think your primary signals are. Then pay attention during the session. What actually shows up when the pressure hits?

Most athletes discover their real signals are different from what they expected. The jaw tension they never noticed. The thought pattern that's been there all along.

Start building your personal early warning system.





STEP 2: BREATH KING OF THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

Your breath is the bridge between your conscious mind and your autonomic nervous system. It's the only part of your stress response you can directly control, which is why it sits at the center of the Rapid Reset tool.

*IF YOU CAN'T CONTROL YOUR
BREATH, YOU CAN'T CONTROL
YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM.*

When athletes go missing, their breathing always changes.

Sometimes it becomes shallow and rapid - you've seen this in the agitated player who can't settle. Sometimes it slows and depletes - watch the collapsed athlete between points and you'll see it. The foggy mind often holds breath without realizing. The critical mind breathes high in the chest, never fully exhaling.

Breath training isn't new. Yoga, tai chi and martial arts have incorporated it for centuries. Big wave surfers train their breath to prevent a stress response when multiple wave

hold-downs occur. Free divers train themselves to dive deep on a single breath; the world record for holding your breath underwater with oxygen preparation is 29 minutes and 3 seconds. Goalkickers, shooters, jumpers, runners, lifters – you name it, they all do breath training.

Breath is king.

What makes Rapid Reset different is the precision. We teach athletes multiple breathing protocols, each designed for different stress states.

Vagus breathing calms an over-aroused nervous system by activating the parasympathetic response. Charge breathing mobilizes an under-aroused system through sympathetic activation. But here's what separates effective breath work from what most people try: the pattern, rhythm, and timing matter as much as the technique itself.

Most athletes think they just need to "take a deep breath." But if you're agitated and you breathe too slowly, you can actually increase your sense of losing control. If you're foggy and you breathe too gently, you stay stuck in the mud.

And here's the trap most people fall into: using breath to up-regulate or down-regulate your energy is powerful, but if you also don't know what your Optimal Energy profile is – one of the key dimensions we measure in the Mind Performance Profile – you can easily stuff your performance up by calming down too much or over-arousing your energy. You might reset yourself right into a different low-performance state.

Remember from Chapter 8: when a player is over-aroused – meaning they are above their optimal performance energy

- their body is tense and tight, and there's too much energy in their system. They fumble and make mistakes. Alternatively, when they are under-aroused, they become sluggish and slow, they miss things and are half a step behind. This is your Stress Curve in action. The breath protocol has to match where you are on the curve.

Over-aroused and in distress? You need to down-regulate. Under-aroused and heading toward overwhelm? You need to bring yourself back up.

The breath is your fastest lever for moving along the Stress Curve. The breath protocol has to match both your current state and where you need to go.

Matthew Hodgson, NBL and Australian Boomer, put it this way:

"Out of all the work that I personally did with Amon at the height of my powers, the Rapid Reset was the most effective. Having an individualized sequence to run through to get back to my performance zone with incredible speed was revolutionary for me."

That individualized sequence - calibrated to Matthew's stress signature and optimal energy zone - is what made the difference.

Elite athletes learn to read their breath as an early warning signal and use it as their fastest reset tool. When we measure their performance before and after mastering breath control, we typically see a 15–25% improvement in their ability to reset under pressure.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPLORE:

Pay attention to your breathing when you're under pressure. Notice how it changes when you're agitated versus anxious versus foggy. Where do you feel the breath in your body? Is it shallow or deep? Fast or slow? This awareness is the foundation. Most people discover their breath tells them what's happening before their conscious mind catches on.





STEP 3: BODY

Here's what many people don't understand about stress:
whatever the mind can't deal with goes into the body.

That tension, that anxiety, that frustration – it doesn't just disappear. It gets stored as muscle tension, postural collapse, or agitated movement.

But here's the powerful part: the relationship runs both ways. Just as your mental state affects your body, your body can affect your mental state. Change your physiology, and you can change your psychology.

**CHANGE YOUR BODY,
CHANGE YOUR STATE.**

This isn't mystical. It's neuroscience. Your brain receives constant feedback from your body about whether you're safe or under threat. Slumped shoulders and a dropped chest signal defeat. Tight fists and a clenched jaw signal aggression. Your brain reads these signals and adjusts your mental state accordingly.

Remember from Chapter 4: the body reveals the mind. Our

bodies are constantly revealing the state of our mind. If we are stressed, you can see micro and macro 'tells' in the body: in our eyes, our shoulders, our voices, our hands, our skin. Think of the hot flush of anxiety, the tight jaw of anger, or the darting eyes of doubt.

Stress creates instant changes in body posture that range from very visible to very subtle. Even the slightest limiting thought can create tension in the neck, the arms or the legs.

Think of the 100 meter sprinter waiting to take the blocks in the Olympic final. You'll see them shaking their legs out, shaking their arms out, jumping up and down, discharging over-arousal out of their system so they aren't tight or wasting energy when the gun goes. Remember, tension is the number one killer of speed.

Every body holds stress in a different type of posture. So until you shift your body, you are not going to be able to reset.

Elite athletes use this loop deliberately. They've learned that specific physical interventions can shift their nervous system in seconds.

WHEN YOU'RE OVER-AROUSSED (AGITATED OR ANXIOUS)

You need to discharge the excess energy that's flooding your system. This isn't about "calming down" through stillness - that often backfires because the energy has nowhere to go. You need to move it through your body.

Shake it out. Literally shake your arms, legs, shoulders. Bounce

on your toes. This isn't random fidgeting – it's deliberate muscle activation and release. Watch animals after a threat passes. They shake. It's their natural reset mechanism.

Stretch the tension points. If your jaw is tight, open it wide and move it side to side. If your shoulders are up around your ears, roll them back and down. If your hands are clenched, spread your fingers wide and stretch them.

Drop your center of gravity. Bend your knees slightly. Lower your stance. This sends a signal to your nervous system: stable, grounded, ready. The agitated athlete stands tall and rigid. The reset athlete lowers their center.

WHEN YOU'RE UNDER-AROUSSED (FOGGY OR CRITICAL)

You need to activate your system, not calm it down. The goal is energy, alertness, presence.

Power pose. Stand tall, chest up, shoulders back, hands on hips or arms raised. Hold it for even ten seconds. Research shows this posture shifts your hormonal state – raising testosterone and lowering cortisol. More importantly, it signals to your brain: "I'm powerful, I'm ready."

Explosive movement. Jump. Sprint in place. Do a few quick push-ups. Anything that spikes your heart rate and demands full-body engagement. This isn't about exercise – it's about neurological activation.

Engage your face. Smile, even if you don't feel like it. The physical act of smiling activates the same neural pathways

as genuine happiness. Boxers do this between rounds. They're not happy about getting punched in the face. They're using their face to shift their state.

MATCH THE INTERVENTION TO THE STATE

Here's where most athletes get it wrong: they use the same physical reset regardless of their state. The agitated player tries to power pose and gets more amped up. The foggy player tries to shake it out but stays disconnected.

The intervention has to match the mind state. When we work with athletes, we map their unique physical patterns and match them to specific body-based resets. Some athletes carry all their tension in their upper body. Others go tight through their hips. Some collapse through their chest. Each pattern requires different interventions.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPLORE:

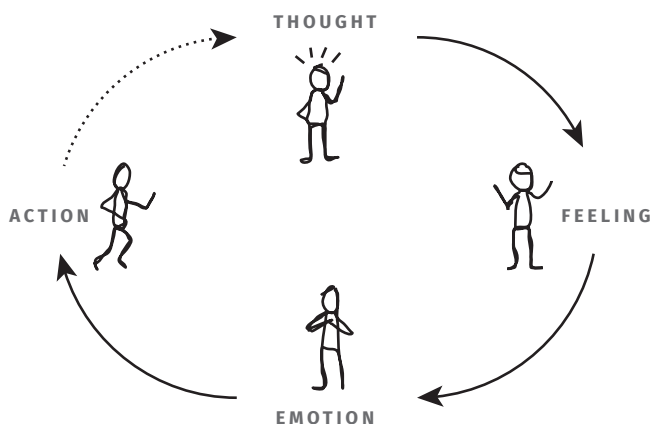
Notice where you hold stress in your body. When you're under pressure, do you get tight? If so, where – jaw, shoulders, hands, chest? Or do you collapse – slumped posture, heavy limbs, low energy?

Start experimenting with simple interventions. When you notice tension, try shaking it out. When you notice collapse, try a power pose. Pay attention to what actually shifts your state. Your body knows what it needs. You just need to listen.



STEP 4: MIND

Your thoughts create your feelings. Your feelings generate emotions. Your emotions drive your actions. This is the loop that either keeps you in a low-performance state or pulls you out of it.



Most athletes try to change their thoughts through logic. They tell themselves, *"Just calm down"* or *"Stop worrying"* or *"Don't be negative."* It doesn't work. You can't think your way out of a thought pattern. The stressed brain doesn't respond to rational arguments.

YOU CAN'T **LOGIC** YOUR WAY
OUT OF AN EMOTIONAL STATE.
YOU NEED A CIRCUIT **BREAKER**.

What works is a mental trigger – a specific phrase or action cue that interrupts the negative loop and redirects your focus. Not positive thinking. Not affirmations. A trigger that's been trained, practiced, and wired into your nervous system so deeply that it fires automatically under pressure.

When Rory McIlroy won the 2014 British Open, he later revealed the two words he'd been repeating to himself all week: 'Process' and 'Spot.' 'Process' kept him locked into his pre-shot routine. 'Spot' kept him focused on rolling the ball over a single point on the green – not on the hole, not on what it would mean, not on how far clear it would get him. Two trained triggers. Four days of sustained pressure. A major championship.

Let's work with the most common one we all see: the player arguing with the ref. The mind has gone into a state of high resistance. The player is stuck in the past, is taking everything personally, and is unable to accept the reality of what is. The ref has made a call, and the game has moved on. It's the player's choice whether to stay in the game or go missing.

It's very common for players to accept only the part of the game that goes the way they want it to go. When we ask the question '*How much of the game goes the way you expect?*', athletes will often say around 60 per cent. 'What's the other 40 per cent?' we ask. '*That's the stuff we hate,*' the players say.

The bad ref's call, the niggling injury, the booing from the crowd, the sledging from the opposition, the bad weather conditions, the teammate's mistake. Forty per cent of the game sends their mind into a state of resistance. Their mind says: *It shouldn't be like this!* and that, in turn, collapses their performance.

But a bad ref's call is just part of the game. The niggling injury is part of the game. The booing from the crowd is part of the game. Sledging is part of the game. Bad weather is part of the game. Mistakes are part of the game. Yet players still spend 40 per cent of their time resisting the very game they have chosen to play.

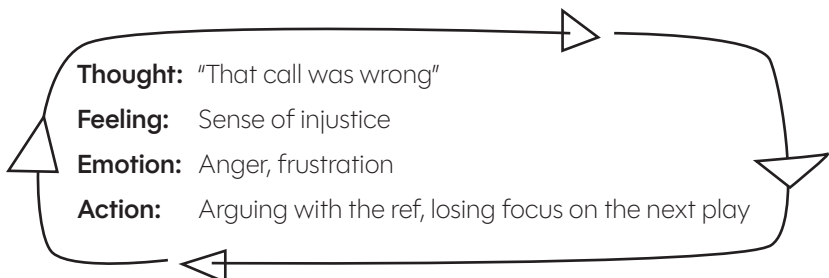
Until we can get the mind to shift out of resistance and into acceptance, the athlete's performance will continue to plummet. They'll likely get erratic, overly aggressive, start over-trying to make up for it or even give away another penalty, and then the problems start to compound.

So a mental trigger to reset the hothead is:

'It's part of the game.'

This simple statement moves the mind into acceptance. They don't have to like what's happening, it's about accepting what is happening.

THIS IS THE LOOP:



The loop feeds itself. The more you think about the injustice, the stronger the emotion gets. The stronger the emotion, the more your brain searches for evidence to support it. Within seconds, you're deep in the hole.

The circuit breaker is the trained mental trigger: "It's part of the game."

Not "It doesn't matter." Not "Let it go." Those phrases don't work because your brain knows they're lies. It DOES matter. It's hard to let go. But "It's part of the game" is true. Bad calls happen. Mistakes happen. Things go wrong. That's the nature of competition.

This trigger does three things:

- 1. Acknowledges reality:** You're not denying what happened or pretending it doesn't matter
- 2. Removes the injustice:** It shifts from "This shouldn't have happened" to "This is what happens in the game"
- 3. Redirects focus:** It pulls you out of the past (what just happened) and into the present (what happens next)

"It's part of the game" becomes your mental anchor. Train it enough times, and it fires automatically when you feel that familiar surge of anger. It doesn't eliminate the emotion, but it stops you from drowning in it.

THE POWER OF THE RIGHT TRIGGER

The trigger has to be:

- **Verb-based:** It must trigger a very clear action
- **Simple:** Three to five words maximum
- **True:** Your brain won't accept obvious lies
- **Personal:** It has to mean something to you
- **Trained:** Repeated thousands of times until it's automatic

Here's the subtlety most people miss: the trigger that works for the agitated mind won't work for the anxious mind. The foggy player needs entirely different language than the critical one.

You know exactly what to do in the next moment and how to do it under real-time pace and pressure. It can't be something you think about, it has to be something that activates a sequence.

And critically, it needs to link to the other steps in a truly meaningful way. "Eyes up" is a great one for someone who is foggy, as the early warning sign can be that they find themselves staring at their bootlaces. The trigger directly addresses the physical signal and creates an immediate action.

For the anxious player whose breath is shallow and whose mind is catastrophizing: "Three breaths." This pulls them out of their racing thoughts and into their body, using the breath to calm their nervous system.

For the critical player dwelling on a mistake with harsh

self-judgment: "Talk to Coach." This anchors them to the supportive inner voice they've trained, replacing the critic with constructive guidance.

When you've wired it correctly, the trigger appears in your mind the instant you need it, without conscious effort. That's when you know it's working.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPLORE:

Identify your most common negative thought loop under pressure. *What's the thought that hooks you? What feeling does it create? What emotion follows? What action results?*

Map the entire sequence. Then start experimenting with mental triggers that might interrupt it. The phrase has to be verb-based and feel right to you – not what sounds good to someone else, but what actually shifts YOUR state and tells you exactly what to do next.

Test it in low-pressure situations first. Notice what works.

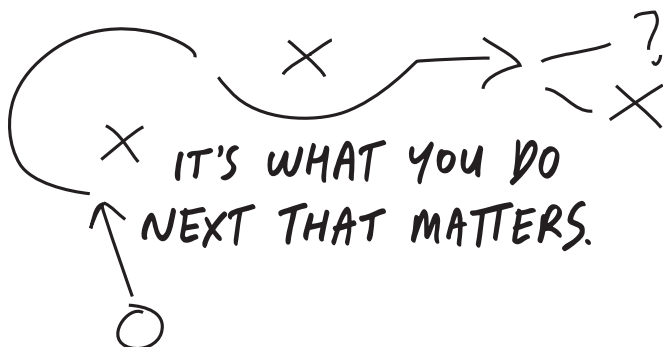


STEP 5: ACTION BRING YOUR WEAPON

The final step is redirecting your focus to something you can control, right now, in the next moment of competition. Not five minutes from now. Not the next quarter or the next set. The very next action.

This is where most athletes stay stuck. They've noticed their signals, controlled their breath, reset their body, and interrupted their thoughts. But they don't have a clear answer to the question: "What now?"

So they drift. They wait for the game to unfold. They react instead of act. And within seconds, they're back in the same low-performance state they just climbed out of.



YOUR TRADEMARK

Every elite athlete has a trademark – something they do better than almost anyone else, something they can rely on when everything else is falling apart. For a basketball player, it might be their defense. For a footballer, it might be their contest work. For a tennis player, it might be their first serve.

Your trademark is your anchor. It's the thing you go back to when you need to rebuild confidence, momentum, or presence. It's not complicated. It's not fancy. It's the fundamental skill you've trained so many times that you can execute it even when your mind is scattered.

The trademark might be based on elements of their game such as speed, strength, tackle, kick, throw, jump, defense. For our purposes, the trademark should be three key things that a player can go back to at any point in the game and that will create success.

Here are a few examples:

- Contest, work rate, fast ball.
- Run and carry, back to cover, kick long.
- Hunt the ball, front foot, defend the land.

Two that All Blacks legend Richie McCaw shared in the documentary *Chasing Great* were:

- Start again, change gear, presence.
- Clean hands, steal, run.

Richie McCaw had a simple trademark: **compete at the breakdown**. When the pressure was on, when his team

needed something, he knew exactly where to direct his focus. Not the score. Not the time left. Not what happened five minutes ago. The next breakdown. That's it.

He had another trademark too: **work rate**. If he felt himself drifting, he'd remind himself to move – get to the next ruck, sprint back on defense, make himself available for a pass.

MOVEMENT CREATES
MOMENTUM. MOMENTUM
CREATES CLARITY.

NEXT JOB

Here's the language that works: "Next job."

Not "the game plan." Not "our strategy." Not some complex tactical adjustment. Just the next job. The very next thing you need to do.

For a football quarterback, it might be: "Next snap." For a football player, it might be: "Make the tackle." For a basketball player: "Get a stop." For a tennis player: "High toss." For a hockey player: "Win the puck." For a golfer: "Head down."

The beauty of "next job" is that it's always achievable. You might not be able to control the outcome of the game, but you can control your effort on the next play. You might not be able to fix everything that's gone wrong, but you can do the next thing right.

This is what brings athletes back to the present moment. Not thinking about it. Not visualizing it. Actually doing it. Action creates clarity.

THE COMBINATION: TRADEMARK + NEXT JOB

Put them together, and you have a complete redirect:

"Contest. Get to the breakdown." "Defense. Lock in on my man." "Fast ball. Explode out of the blocks."

This combination does two things:

1. **Trademark** reminds you of your strength, your foundation, what you can always rely on
2. **Next job** directs your focus to the immediate action, preventing your mind from drifting into the past or future

It's simple. It's concrete. It's executable right now.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPLORE:

What's your trademark? What's the one thing you can do at a high level even when everything else is falling apart? If you're not sure, think about what you go back to when you're playing well. What's the foundation of your performance? Once you've identified it, practice pairing it with "next job" in training. Notice how quickly this combination pulls you into the present moment.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

"Guys, I know we're all going to make mistakes this year. It's not whether you make them or not that concerns me, it's how quickly you get over them."

- Senior AFL Player, St Kilda

Rapid Reset works when all five domains sync up in a sequence that matches your stress state and performance needs. Here's what a full reset looks like in real time:

You're in the middle of a game. You just made a critical error. The other team scored because of your mistake. You can feel yourself spiraling – jaw clenched, thoughts racing, anger building. You're going agitated.

Signal: You catch it early. Tight jaw, racing thoughts, frustration rising. You know this pattern.

Breath: Three deep breaths. You're over-aroused, so you use vagus breathing – in through the nose, long slow exhale through the mouth. Each exhale releases tension. You feel your nervous system start to settle.

Body: You shake out your arms and shoulders. Roll your neck. Drop your center of gravity, bend your knees slightly. The physical tension starts to discharge.

Mind: Your trigger fires: "It's part of the game." The thought

loop breaks. You're not denying the mistake happened, but you're stopping the spiral of anger and self-judgment.

Action: Your trademark is "Contest. Win the ball." Your focus narrows to the immediate task. Not the mistake. Not the score. The next contest.

Total time: Under ten seconds.



The abbreviated version – what we call a micro reset – might look like this:

Breath + Mind + Action: One deep exhale, mental trigger, next job.

Total time: Three seconds.

Or even simpler:

Mind + Action: Mental trigger, next job.

Total time: One second.

The full five-step reset is for when you're deep in a low-performance state and need the complete intervention. The micro reset is for when you feel yourself starting to drift but haven't gone too far yet. Both work. The key is matching the level of intervention to the level of disturbance.

Elite athletes practice all versions until the reset becomes instinctive. They don't have to think about which version to use or which step comes next. The situation tells them. Their body tells them. The reset just happens.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Here's what separates athletes who know about Rapid Reset from athletes who can actually execute it under pressure: practice.

Not casual practice. Not "I'll try to remember this in the game" practice. Systematic, deliberate, pressure-tested practice.

You need to practice each step individually until you can execute it without thinking. Then you practice linking the steps together. Then you practice in simulated pressure. Then you practice in actual competition.

Most athletes make the mistake of waiting until they're deep in the hole before they try to reset. By then, it's too late. Your stressed brain can't learn new skills. It can only execute what's already been wired through hundreds of repetitions.

The phrase "practice makes perfect" is wrong. Practice makes permanent. Perfect practice makes perfect. If you practice sloppy resets, you'll execute sloppy resets under pressure. If you practice precise, deliberate resets when you're calm, those patterns will be available to you when you're stressed.

This is why we drill these sequences with athletes until they become automatic. Not so they can think about them during competition, but so they don't have to think about them. The reset becomes as natural as breathing.

YOUR WAY OUT

You're going to go missing. Every athlete does. The margin between good and great isn't avoiding the low-performance states – it's how fast you can reset when you find yourself there.

It happens at every level, in every sport. Roberto Baggio's penalty over the crossbar in the 1994 World Cup Final. Chris Webber calling a timeout Michigan didn't have in the 1993 NCAA Championship. Scott Norwood's "Wide Right" field goal in the 1991 Super Bowl. Bill Buckner's ground ball through his legs in the 1986 World Series. One moment. One mental lapse. A legacy forever marked.

And then there's Jean Van de Velde on the final hole of the 1999 British Open. Three-shot lead. All he needs is a double-bogey six to win his first major championship. He hits his drive into the rough. Instead of resetting – taking a breath, refocusing, playing safe – he goes aggressive. The ball ricochets off the grandstand. He still doesn't reset. Next shot goes into the water. Then the bunker. By the time he finishes, he's made a triple-bogey seven, forcing a playoff he loses.

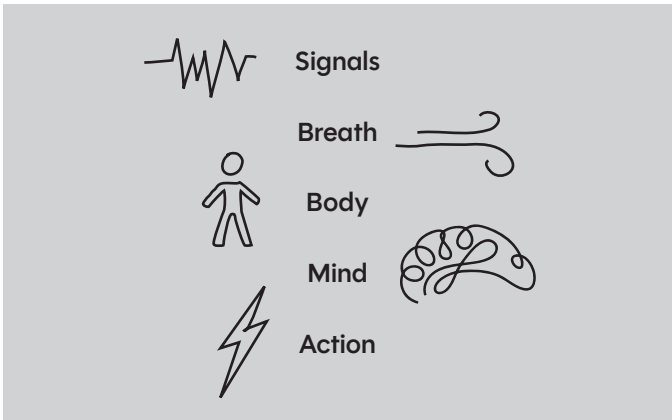
Here's what makes it so haunting: watch the footage and Van de Velde looks calm on the outside. There's even the famous photo of him standing in the water, pants rolled up, with a smile on his face. But remember what we learned in Chapter 4: the mind controls the body, and the body follows the mind. His mind had gone missing, and his body followed. Shots he'd made a million times – shots he'd executed perfectly in previous rounds of that very tournament – suddenly failed. His motor skills collapsed. His touch disappeared. One hole.

Multiple chances to reset between each shot. He couldn't. And a major championship slipped away.

These moments aren't about lack of talent, skill, or heart. They're about the mind going missing under pressure – and not having the tools to get it back.

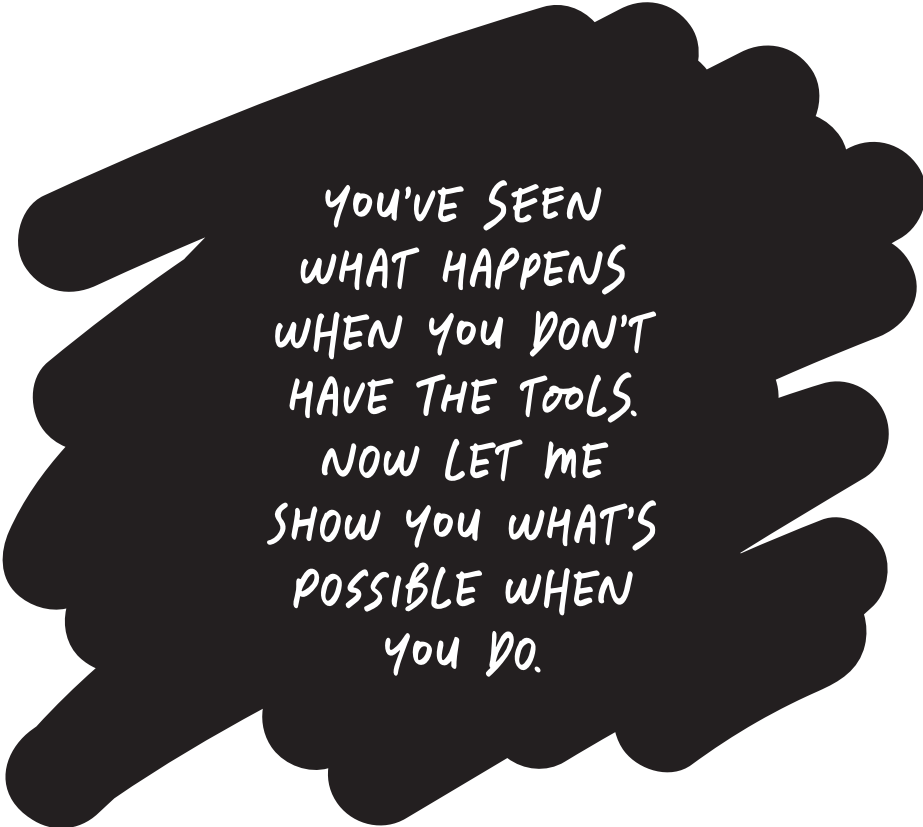
Ten seconds can change everything. Ten seconds of mental absence can cost you everything you've worked for. Ten seconds of trained reset can save your legacy.

The framework is here:

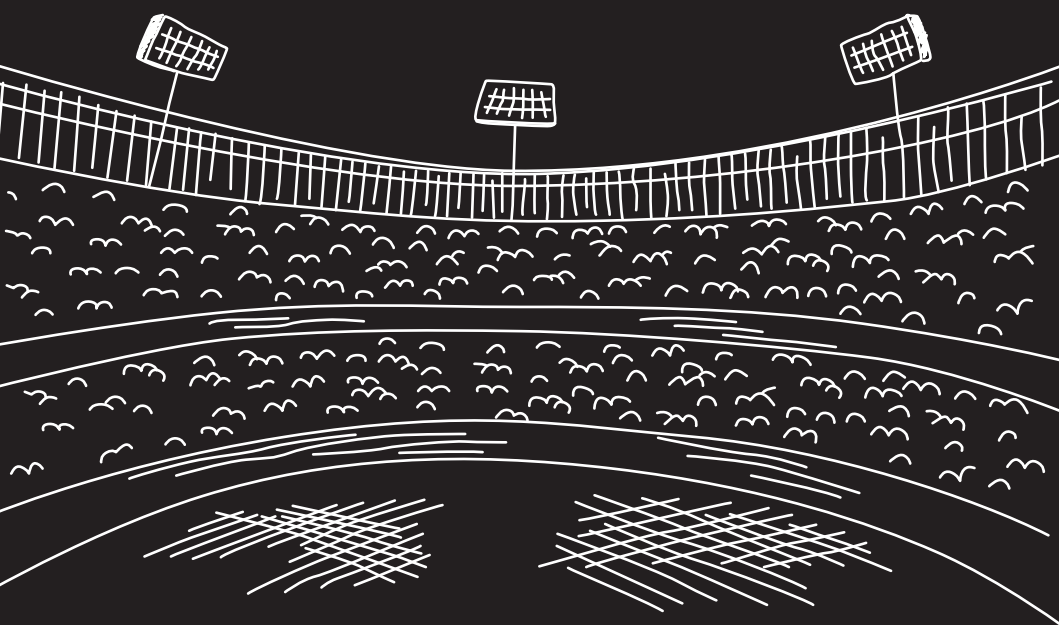


You know what's possible. You've seen the cost of not having it.

This is your insurance policy. Your way back. Your best chance to ensure that when the moment arrives – the moment that will define your career, your season, your legacy – you'll be available to meet it.



YOU'VE SEEN
WHAT HAPPENS
WHEN YOU DON'T
HAVE THE TOOLS.
NOW LET ME
SHOW YOU WHAT'S
POSSIBLE WHEN
YOU DO.





CHAPTER 12

THE MOMENTS THAT MATTER

The South Sydney Rabbitohs are a foundation club in Australia's National Rugby League competition, and the most successful team in the competition's history, having won 20 premierships and been runners-up 13 times.

However, by 2014 it had been 43 long years since the club had last tasted premiership victory.

In 2012 and 2013, the South Sydney Rabbitohs had been a strong team, making it to the Semifinals in both years.

In 2012 they started strongly and led 8-4 over the Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs, before conceding 28 unanswered points. In 2013 they again started strongly and led 14-0, only to concede 30 unanswered points to the Manly-Warringah Sea Eagles.

Two years in a row, the same story.

Strong start. Building pressure. Momentum shift. Collapse.



AT THE BIG MOMENTS,
ON THE BIG STAGE,
THEY HAD GONE MISSING.

THE SEARCH FOR A SOLUTION

The head coach, Michael Maguire, had built one of the most physically prepared squads in the NRL. His standards were legendary. His training camps were renowned for their intensity – conditioning sessions designed to push players to their limits and beyond. No shortcuts, no excuses. It was this relentless pursuit of excellence that had taken a club with a 43-year drought and made them genuine contenders.

By the end of 2013, Maguire had done everything right. His players were among the fittest in the competition. He was confident that he had the right players, that he was the right coach, and that the club had a great culture. The physical foundation was elite.

Yet when the pressure came on in the finals, the team had fallen short. Again.

What Maguire did next took genuine courage. At a time when no other NRL head coach was investing in systematic Mental Performance Training, Maguire recognized something that most coaches wouldn't admit for another decade: that the missing piece wasn't physical. His players' bodies were ready. Their minds weren't. Toughening the body further wasn't going to toughen the mind. Running up another mountain or carrying another log would not win the Rabbitohs a Grand Final.

Maguire went in search of something that could strengthen his players' mental resilience. He needed training for the

mind that was grounded in performance – not therapy, not counseling, not motivation. He needed Mental Performance Training. He became the first NRL coach to integrate a structured mental performance program into a championship campaign – a decision that would prove decisive.

His brief to Derek was simple: *"I want the players to be more mentally resilient, so that when we get back to the finals this year, we play our best game, not our worst."*

THE MISSING PIECE

Throughout the 2014 season, the Rabbitohs undertook over 20 Mental Performance Training sessions. The players learned to understand the Stress Curve and how to manage their bandwidth. They learned to recognize the four low-performance mind states – Anxious, Agitated, Critical, and Foggy. Most importantly, they learned how to master the Rapid Reset.

If you watch the footage from that season, you'll see the players resetting all year. After scoring a try, or having a try scored against them, you will see them coming together and resetting – managing the highs as well as the lows. When they made a mistake, you will see a reset. Bad ref calls – another reset. Time and time again, they were resetting their minds to get themselves back into the present.

Players remarked how calm they felt all game. How focused. How present.

Mental Performance Training became a key part of their

training program and their on-field toolkit.

Nine months later, South Sydney made it to the 2014 NRL Grand Final against the Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs – the same team that had demolished them in the 2012 finals.

Everything they had trained for – everything their fans had waited 43 years for – came down to 80 minutes.

ELEVEN SECONDS

The opening siren sounds. October 5, 2014. ANZ Stadium, Sydney. Over 83,000 fans roaring. The weight of 43 years of failure pressing down on every Rabbitoh.

Sam Burgess, the English forward and heart of the team, brings the ball up on the very first play of the Grand Final. A heavy collision occurs, driven by the intensity of a championship atmosphere.

An opposing forward's head smashes into Burgess's cheekbone. His face fractures in nine places. The bone bouncing up and down in his face. The club doctor, Andrew McDonald, later warns him he risks losing his eye.

Eleven seconds into the biggest game of their lives, their star player's face is destroyed.

Most players would go off. Most players wouldn't even consider continuing. This wasn't just an injury – it was career-threatening, potentially life-altering damage.

But Sam Burgess had tools to reach for.

The shock, the pain, the fear – all trying to pull him out of the present. But in that moment, Burgess made a choice.

After the game, he told Derek that he had used the mental performance tools during the match. Rather than catastrophising about the injury and spiralling into an anxious, agitated or critical mind state, he focused on one question at a time.

"What's my next job?"

Not "Can I keep playing?" Not "How bad is this?" Not "This shouldn't be happening."

Just: "What's my next job?"

He made one tackle. Then he brought the ball up once. "I took it moment by moment," he later said.

Play by play, he stayed present.

MIND OVER MATTER

Opposition players appeared to target his fractured cheekbone, attempting to headbutt it to provoke him into reacting, giving away a penalty, or forcing him off the field. But Burgess had control of his mind.

With his cheekbone fractured in nine places, bouncing up and down in his face, dealing with intense pain that would hospitalize most people, Burgess went on to play the game of his life. He made 38 tackles – more than any other player on the field. He ran for over 100 metres.

But it was more than statistics. He kept running up to his teammates and saying, "I'm here for you!" Spine-tingling motivation for everyone. He was everywhere, inspiring his teammates through sheer presence and mental will.

The Rabbitohs won 30–6. They broke their 43-year premiership drought. Sam Burgess was named Man of the Match, and his performance entered NRL folklore as one of the greatest individual displays in Grand Final history.

Sam Burgess's Grand Final performance wasn't just built in nine months. It was built over a lifetime – years of physical conditioning, technical development, tactical preparation, and competitive experience at the highest level.

The Rabbitohs' high-performance staff, coaching team, and medical personnel had all contributed to building the athlete who took the field that day. Maguire's relentless standards had created a squad that was physically elite. That foundation was essential, and every person who contributed to it deserves credit for what happened on October 5, 2014.

But on that day, Burgess had something extra. An additional ingredient that his competitors didn't have.

When physical toughness, talent, and preparation were a given – when every other element was in place – it was his mental training that gave him another level.

Mind over matter. The mind controls the body.

43 YEARS

They had filled the missing piece. When the pressure came, they had a competitive advantage their opponents didn't - tools to reach for.

When Sam Burgess's face was destroyed in the 11th second, he had tools. When pressure mounted, when momentum shifted, when mistakes happened, when the opposition pushed back - the entire team had tools to reach for.

Sam Burgess's performance was iconic. But the Rabbitohs won as a team.

They all made the choice, moment by moment, to master their minds. They all kept resetting, all game long. They did it together.

That's what Mental Performance Training looks like under the brightest lights, against the highest stakes, when everything is on the line.

Behind this team performance was a coach who made it possible.

Michael Maguire's willingness to pioneer Mental Performance Training in the NRL - at a time when no other coach in the competition would - gave his players the tools they needed when it mattered most.

The 2014 premiership was a triumph for the players who mastered their minds on the biggest stage. And it was a triumph for a coach brave enough to look beyond the body and invest in the mind.

Not theory. Not hope. Not willpower.

Tools. Training. Mastery.

The Rabbitohs didn't rise to the occasion. They defaulted to their level of preparation. When the moments that matter arrived, they were ready.

**FORTY-THREE YEARS
OF DROUGHT.**



**TWO YEARS
OF COLLAPSE.**



**NINE MONTHS
OF PREPARATION.**



**ELEVEN SECONDS
OF CATASTROPHE.**



**EIGHTY MINUTES
OF MASTERY.**

The mind controls the body. And on October 5, 2014, the South Sydney Rabbitohs proved it.

*"After all these
years of putting
the mental work
in, it's paid off."*

Simone Biles

11x Olympic medalist,
Most Decorated Gymnast in History



EXTRA TIME

**MASTER
THE MOMENT**

IN FIVE YEARS,
THE MIND WILL BE
THE FOURTH PILLAR OF
HIGH PERFORMANCE.

Athletes will measure their mental performance with the same precision they measure speed, power, and endurance. They'll know the 30 mental performance skills as well as they know their physical training programs. They'll train their minds daily – not just when they're struggling, but as part of their routine preparation.

Mind Performance Profiles will be as standard as fitness testing. Athletes will own their mental development the way they own their physical development. They'll speak the language of mental performance fluently – bandwidth, mind states, early warning signs, Rapid Resets.

High-performance programs will invest in mental training infrastructure the way they invest in strength and conditioning facilities. And coaches won't outsource the mind to sports psychologists and mental skills coaches. Those specialists will still exist for advanced work, for clinical support, for elite-level refinement. But foundational mental performance training? That will be the coach's job.

Just like coaches are expected to understand basic strength training principles, nutrition fundamentals, and injury prevention – they'll be expected to coach the mind. It will be a core competency, a standard part of coaching certification.

Coaches will recognize the four low-performance mind states in real time. They'll know how to help athletes reset during games. They'll build mental bandwidth the way they build aerobic capacity. They'll coach the mind, not just hope athletes figure it out.

This isn't speculation. This is trajectory. The mind controls 90 per cent of what happens on the field. Eventually, high performance will catch up to that reality.

The question isn't whether this will happen.

The question is: where will you be when it does?

THIS MOMENT

Here's what makes this moment critical.

When Mental Performance Training becomes standard across elite sport, there will be no competitive advantage in having it. Everyone will have it. It will be table stakes.

But right now? Most athletes don't train the mind systematically. Most coaches can't diagnose mind states under pressure. Most programs haven't implemented systematic programs for measuring and training the mind.

Right now, there's a window. A brief period where the athletes and teams who invest in this will dominate, while everyone else catches up.

The South Sydney Rabbitohs had that window in 2014. They had the same physical foundations as everyone else - and

their coach, Michael Maguire, had the foresight to add mental training as the additional edge. They broke a 43-year drought.

The New Zealand All Blacks had it after 2007. They became the most dominant team in rugby history.

The Seattle Seahawks had it in 2011. Three years later, they won the Super Bowl.

These teams moved early. They built mental performance infrastructure before it became expected. And they dominated for years while their competitors slowly realized what they were missing.

That same window exists right now. But it won't last.

EARLY OR LATE

You don't have to wait for your club. You don't have to wait for your coach. You don't have to wait for permission.

Individual athletes are already moving. They're measuring their minds. They're learning the 30 mental performance skills. They're training the Rapid Reset. They're not waiting.

Some will lead this shift individually. Others will experience it through forward-thinking programs. Both paths work.

The question is simple: will you be early or late?

In five years, everyone will train the mind. But the athletes who move today will be five years ahead.

YOUR MOVE

The moments that matter are coming for you.

The championship game. The career-defining performance. The moment where everything you've trained for either shows up or doesn't.

The pressure will come. The stakes will rise. Your body will be ready. Your skills will be sharp. Your game plan will be clear.

But will your mind be trained?

When your 10 seconds that matter arrive, will you have tools to reach for, or will you go missing like so many talented athletes do?

The fourth pillar is coming. Mental performance will become standard. The mind will be measured, trained, and mastered.

That future is inevitable.

But you don't have to wait for it.

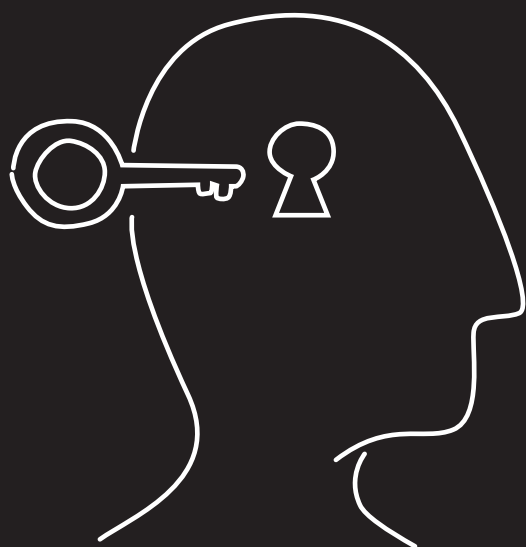
Lead this shift, or be left behind.

Be early, or be late.

The moments that matter are coming.

Will you go missing in action?

Or will you be ready?





POST GAME

**UNLOCK
YOUR MIND**

You've seen what happens when the mind goes missing - and what's possible when it's trained. World Cup finals lost. Grand Finals collapsed. Championships choked away in seconds. And a 43-year drought ended. A team that fell apart learning to reset together. An athlete with a shattered face playing the game of his life.

The difference between the two? **You can't train what you can't measure.** Just like a GPS shows you exactly where you are on the field, the **Mind Performance Profile (MPP)** shows you exactly where you are in your head.

In five minutes, you'll get a precise snapshot of your mental performance across **30 key mental skills** spanning **7 critical dimensions** of performance - from focus and confidence to emotional regulation, resilience, and the ability to reset under pressure.

You'll walk away knowing:

- **Where you're strong** - the mental skills you can build on right now
- **Where you're exposed** - the gaps that are quietly costing you in big moments
- **Which mind state you default to** - whether you tend toward anxious, agitated, critical or foggy when pressure peaks
- **What to train next** - a practical toolkit to start shifting your mind, not just understanding it



To explore, head to the link below or scan the QR code.

humanperformancegroup.co/profiles

FOR ATHLETES: STOP GUESSING. START TRAINING.

You train every physical dimension of your game with precision. Strength. Speed. Skills. Conditioning.

But the mental side? Most athletes are flying blind.

The MPP gives you the same precision for your mind that your strength coach gives you for your body. A baseline. A gap analysis. And a structured path forward.

Our mental performance programs are built on 30+ years of success at the elite level – from Olympic gold medals and World Championships to Grand Final victories and career-defining performances when it counted most.

The best athletes in the world train their minds with the same discipline as their bodies. Now you can too.

Five minutes. Your entire mental game.



To explore, head to the link below or scan the QR code.

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FOR COACHES: KNOW YOUR TEAM'S MENTAL MAP

Imagine walking into game day knowing before a ball is kicked, which player is carrying too much stress, who's about to go foggy in the third quarter, and who tends to self-destruct after one mistake.

The MPP gives you that intelligence.

- Profile every player across 30 mental skills
- Identify individual and team-wide vulnerabilities before they surface under pressure
- Build a shared language for what's happening above the shoulders
- Target your mental skills training where it will have the greatest impact

The best coaches of the next decade won't just speak the language of tactics and physical conditioning. **They'll speak the language of the mind.**



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SAME MIND. DIFFERENT ARENA.

The mental skills measured by the MPP don't stop at the sideline.

For leaders and executives – the same mental skills that separate great athletes from good ones are exactly what separate great leaders from good ones. High-stakes decisions, pressure-filled moments, managing teams through uncertainty, the mental game is identical.

For first responders and military personnel – when your performance in critical moments can mean the difference between life and death, mastering your mind under pressure isn't a competitive advantage. It's a necessity.

For individuals – you don't need to be a professional athlete or a CEO to benefit from knowing how your mind works under pressure. If you've ever gone missing in a moment that mattered, a presentation, a conversation, a decision, a competition, the MPP will show you why, and give you the tools to respond differently next time.

The mind is under more load than at any other time in human history.



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THE PROFILE IS JUST THE BEGINNING

Whether your arena is a Grand Final, a boardroom, a crisis scene, or everyday life, the foundation of consistent high performance is the same.

Understanding where you go is the first step. The MPP also gives you a **practical toolkit** – proven techniques to actively shift your mind state when pressure hits, so you spend more time in the Performance Zone and less time going missing.

This isn't self-reflection. It's mental skills training – measurable, practical, and immediately applicable to your game.

Before you read another page, find out where your mind goes under pressure.

Scan the code. Take the profile. Get your blueprint.

Because the difference between going missing and showing up in the moments that matter isn't talent, heart, or how hard you train.

It's knowing where you go – and having the tools to get back.



To explore, head to the link below or scan the QR code.

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TRAIN THE MIND.
MASTER THE MOMENT.

Amon Wouffe
Derek Leddie

Athletes Go Missing In Action.

In the biggest moments and on the biggest stages, mental lapses mean the difference between ultimate success and failure.

But where do they go in their minds?

We've all seen it. In Super Bowls, Championships, World Cups and Olympics, fans watch on in disbelief as the best athletes in the world go missing when it matters most. These aren't failures of skill or fitness. They're failures of the mind. And until now, coaches and athletes have struggled to have a simple way to understand - or measure - what's actually happening.

After years inside the dressing rooms of elite sport, two Mental Performance Coaches have developed a simple model that for the first time makes the invisible visible. This book explains what's happening in the mind under pressure, why it's happening, and how it can be measured and trained just like any physical skill.

Mental performance isn't a personality trait.

It's the last frontier.

*"It's taken my game to a more consistent higher level.
Getting away from dwelling on mistakes, and into
acceptance, reframing and firing again."*

- Joseph Mills, Defender, Northampton FC

Amon Woulfe and Derek Leddie

have trained athletes and coaches
across the NRL, AFL, NBL, and English
Football League.

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