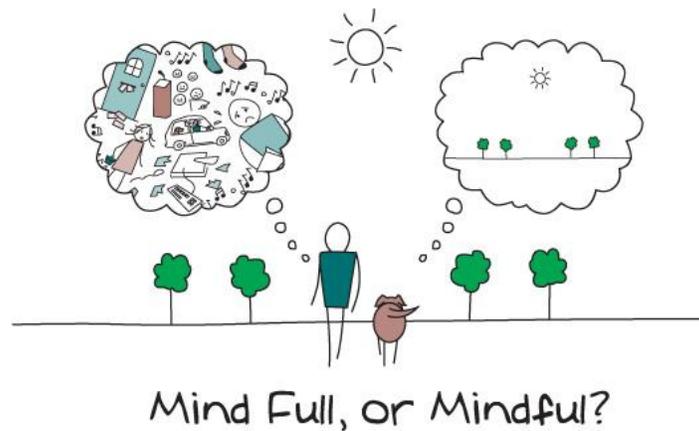


# The Mindful Athlete

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The attitudes with which athletes approach their sport performance can have a profound impact on how well they perform and how much they enjoy their sport experience. Athletes can learn attitudes and skills through practicing mindfulness. *In essence, mindfulness is intentionally choosing to be meaningfully engaged in what you are doing here and now with a curious and accepting attitude.*

## Getting Started

Take 5 minutes right now to focus your attention on your breathing. Notice the flow of the air as you inhale and exhale. Notice the rise and the fall of your chest and stomach. Notice your breathing rhythm. When you become distracted by a thought, sound, or physical sensation... notice that your mind has wandered and gently bring your focus back to your breathing.

Mindful breathing is a simple exercise to practice mindfulness. This same exercise can be practiced while eating a meal, walking across campus, talking to a friend, or listening in a class. Fully engage in all aspects of what you are doing and learn to notice when your mind wanders. Then simply refocus on the task at hand. When you first begin practicing mindfulness your mind will wander quite often. However, with repeated practice your ability to be fully present will improve.

## A Mindful Approach to Competition

Athletes are often their own worst enemy. All of the hard work, training, and practice can be for naught when the wrong mental approach is taken at game time. Athletes are often too focused on performance outcomes. Furthermore, they tend to emotionalize the experience by demanding perfection and judging themselves and their performance during the competition. There is a better, mindful approach to performance:

- **Non-judging** - observe the present moment without evaluation and judgment
- **Non-striving** - remain unattached to the outcome by focusing instead on the process of executing the game plan

- **Nonattachment** - let go of grasping and clinging to pre-determined outcomes. Allow the process to simply unfold
- **Acceptance** - see and acknowledge things as they are in the present moment
- **Patience** - allow things to unfold in their time
- **Trust** - develop a basic trust in your experience
- **Beginner's Mind** - see things freshly, as if it were for the first time
- **Curiosity** - a spirit of interest, investigation, and exploration
- **Letting go** - let go of thoughts, feelings, and past experiences
- **Kindness** - be good to yourself by noticing the positive aspects of your performance and accepting that imperfections are part of the game
- **Non-reactivity** - ability to choose your response with clarity instead of automatically reacting in a habitual, conditioned way
- **Love of the Game** - fully engage in the sport you love and enjoy all aspects of the game

Ideas for this handout came from [The Art and Science of Mindfulness](#) by Shauna Shapiro and Linda Carlson

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