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MINDFUL VOLLEYBALL: A COMPLETE MINDFULNESS PROGRAM FOR VOLLEYBALL TEAMS, ATHLETES, AND COACHES

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MINDFUL VOLLEYBALL: A COMPLETE MINDFULNESS PROGRAM FOR
VOLLEYBALL TEAMS, ATHLETES, AND COACHES

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Master's Project

In

Kinesiology (Sport Psychology)

May 1, 2019

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Contents

Setting the Stage

Mindful Volleyball Program

Session 1: A 3-step Approach to Training

Follow your breath script

Deep breath script

Just three breaths

Session 2: Taking a Timeout

Candy exercise

When eating, just eat

Session 3: Body Awareness

Progressive muscle relaxation script

Body scan

Using your non-dominant hand

Session 4: Mindful Stretching

Mindful stretch

Mindful yoga

Mindfulness of posture

Session 5: Get Moving with the Warm Up

Walking meditation

Bottoms of the feet

Session 6: See the Court

Imagery practice

Lake meditation

Impatience

Session 7: Stepping onto the Court

Skills progression (phase 1)

Just mindfulness

Session 8: Teamwork

Loving kindness meditation

Appreciation

Session 9: Increasing the Tempo

Skills progression (phase 2)

Rest your hands

Session 10: Maintaining Training

Notice trees

References

Appendix A: Review of Literature

Appendix B: Mindfulness Tracking Log

Appendix C: Brainspin™ Cards

Mindful Volleyball: A Complete Mindfulness Program for Volleyball Teams, Athletes, and Coaches

During competition, not only are athletes expected to perform well, but they also must be able to shift their attention to what is relevant, make quick decisions, and fight through challenges and mistakes (i.e., adversity) *while* performing well. An increasingly popular way to train these aspects of mental performance is through mindfulness practice. Being able to pay attention, without judgment to what is happening in the present moment (i.e., being mindful; Kabat-Zinn, 1994) plays a role in success on the court or field (Mannion, in press). An attacker in volleyball must be able to forget about her last attempt where she was blocked, evaluate the opposing team's defense, decide on her next attack, and apply her skills to the current play being called by her setter. While many hours are spent training how to jump higher, swing harder, and hit different shots in sport, there is less time spent training how to focus, stay mentally strong, and make appropriate decisions.

Setting the Stage

Mindful Volleyball (MV) is a mental training program that is designed to enhance one's ability to be mindful, specifically within the context of volleyball. MV is intended for use with volleyball athletes and coaches, however, the practices can be adapted to fit other sports. Through education, formal practice (e.g., sitting meditation), informal practice (e.g., being mindful throughout the day's activities), and mindful volleyball, individuals learn skills to enhance their mindful experiences. The practices are discussed within the context of volleyball training, practice, and competition in addition to how they can be utilized with other activities of daily living (e.g., while driving, walking, eating, etc.).

Mindfulness has many benefits that can aid sport performance¹. Research on mindfulness practice shows that mindfulness can:

- increase awareness
- decrease stress
- improve focus
- enhance relationships
- improve emotion regulation
- increase enjoyment

This program provides the resources and practices necessary to build and train mindfulness skills both inside and outside of sport. The next sections provide details about the program, including things to know and do before beginning, the setup of the program, and what to expect in the program. Before jumping into the content of Mindful Volleyball, be sure to read through and understand the material.

Preparing to Use the Mindful Volleyball Program

The goal of MV is to provide athletes and coaches with a step-by-step manual for how to bring mindfulness into the sport of volleyball. The sessions are as follows:

- Session 1: A 3-step approach to training
- Session 2: Taking a timeout
- Session 3: Body awareness
- Session 4: Mindful stretching
- Session 5: Get moving with the warm up

¹ For an extensive review of the literature on mindfulness and sport performance, see Appendix A

- Session 6: See the court
- Session 7: Stepping onto the court
- Session 8: Teamwork
- Session 9: Increasing the tempo:
- Session 10: Maintaining training

First, mindfulness will be introduced, and basic mindfulness skills will be learned.

Throughout the 10-week program athletes expand on these skills and develop different aspects of mindfulness through consistent practice. Each session in the program builds off of the previous ones. MV begins by practicing mindfulness while still and advances to include mindfulness within volleyball performance. Athletes will learn about the mind-body connection and imagery as well as become better skilled at taking a pause out of the day and being a good teammate. Other areas of discussion include the relationships between mindfulness and compassion, nonjudgment, presence, awareness, attention, and building relationships. Upon conclusion, the program provides direction for continued growth and practice.

Throughout the program, “athlete” will be used to refer to those participating in the program. While coaches may benefit from MV, volleyball players are the target audience. “Leaders” will be used to refer to those leading others through the program. This could be a team captain sharing the program with their² team or a coach providing the training for a team. It is suggested that at minimum, the leader read through the entire program and be familiar with the material before leading others through. This way, the leader can adapt any material (e.g., scripts) as needed, be prepared for discussions, and be comfortable teaching the material to others.

² “Their”, they, them, etc. is used to be inclusive to all gender identities and still refers to the person in the singular sense throughout this paper.

Further, it will help if the leader does not read word for word from the program, but rather has a thorough understanding of the material and merely uses the manual as a guide when teaching. This allows the leader to fit MV to the style of their specific group and may help athletes have confidence in their leader's knowledge of the material. It is best (but not required) that the leader has previous experience with mindfulness and meditation, however no previous knowledge about mindfulness or meditation is needed for athletes. While MV is intended for use with groups, a single athlete or coach can successfully work through the program alone. Modifications for those working solo are made throughout the text.

For athletes and coaches to have the most success with Mindful Volleyball, it is important that the culture and team environment embraces openness and acceptance. Throughout the MV program, those who participate are going to be challenged to explore and expand in many ways including in the way they think. Having a space where one feels safe sharing these experiences is important for mindfulness development throughout the program. For some teams, this may be part of their everyday culture. For others, it may be completely new. Some suggestions for how to remain open and accepting of others include:

- recognize no one (including you) will be perfect
- accept mistakes as opportunities to learn
- understand everyone's journey to a more mindful life is unique
- withdraw judgment (from yourself and from others)
- learn from others but do not strive to be like them
- maintain confidentiality of what others share in session

Before beginning the program, share these suggestions with the athletes who are participating in MV. Lead a discussion about why openness and acceptance are important for a

team as they take on a new challenge. Take some time to address each bullet point individually to make sure understanding is clear. Allow athletes time to ask questions for clarification if needed. If athletes wish to add their own suggestions to the list, that is encouraged. Once the final list is complete, write all of the agreements on a poster board and have each athlete sign the poster, signifying their commitment. Hang the poster somewhere in a team environment (e.g., in the locker room) to serve as a daily visible reminder for athletes.

Length of Sessions

Each session in the MV program can be completed in one 60- to 90-minute sitting. However, this is simply a suggestion and is expected to fluctuate based on various circumstances. A session may take longer for larger teams and conversely move quicker with smaller groups. Additionally, if an athlete is doing this program solo, they may get through the content faster. The sessions are designed to take place once per week and can be completed in one sitting. It is not recommended to advance through the material faster than what is suggested in the program (i.e., do more than one session per week). Even if athletes have a clear understanding of the mindfulness concepts, applied practice is the best way to build skill. The weekly at home practices are the bulk of where athletes will work on their mindful abilities.

It is the leader's discretion if they want the material split up over a longer period of time. Leaders may find that there are topics they want to spend more time on or topics that need to be re-visited. This is encouraged as needed. Open discussions with athletes may alert leaders of certain material that needs further exploration. Because each session builds off of the previous session, less emphasis is placed on following the time suggested and more emphasis is placed on making sure all athletes understand and feel comfortable with the content before moving

forward. Just as a setter needs to have good footwork before learning how to jump-set, minds need to master the fundamentals before building to more complex mental skills.

Session Structure

Each session begins with a brief overview of the lesson and what it includes. If any additional materials or equipment are needed to run the session or any of the activities, they are listed here. Also addressed are the purpose and goals of the session. A layout of the session is listed so the program is easy to follow. The components of most sessions are discussed in the following sections.

Start with your breath: Each session begins with “start with your breath,” which refers to a specific breathing exercise introduced in the first session. This is done each week to build the habit of becoming aware of one’s breath. It also serves as a reminder to start any type of training by tuning into the breath because the breath is something that is present all the time. A brief, discussion (2-3 minutes) is encouraged following each time this exercise is practiced.

Suggestions for discussion are given in each session.

Practice discussion: This section begins in session two. Before moving to the new content of the current session, time is spent reviewing the at home practices from the previous week. 5-10 minutes are suggested for this discussion, but some weeks may spark more conversation than others. This is a time for athletes to discuss progress or struggles and to ask questions that may have come up throughout the week. Suggestions for discussion are given in each session.

Execution: The bulk of the session includes two parts. The first part is introducing the lesson or concept of the week. Instead of reading word-for-word to those who are learning, it is suggested that the leader be familiar with the material enough to teach it while only using the program as a

guide. It is important to ensure athletes understand why the practices are included and how they can benefit from them before moving into the mindfulness exercises.

The second part includes the step-by-step process of implementing the activity with athletes. For example, in session 2, the lesson involves learning about the concept of taking a pause and the activity introduces one way to practice taking a pause (e.g., candy exercise). This section is the application and practice of the skills. Leaders can check for understanding throughout the session using various discussion points or check-ins. A five-minute discussion is suggested after an athlete participates in a new activity or exercise. Suggestions for discussion are given in session for each activity.

At home practices: Just as a volleyball player cannot practice her jump serve once per week and expect great results, the mental skills provided in this program need consistent practice for best results too. Included in this section are suggestions for at home practices throughout the week. At home practice will include formal practices (e.g., sitting meditations) and informal practices (e.g., mindful stretching). Each session clearly states which mindfulness training to practice at home and how many times it is expected to be practiced that week. For example, the formal at home practice for session 6 is to complete the lake meditation 3 times.

Elephant: Also included in at home practices are “Elephant” exercises. Adapted from the book, *How to Train a Wild Elephant* (Bays, 2011), elephant exercises bring mindfulness into activities of daily living. These do not require a certain amount of practice (e.g., 3 times per week), but rather are challenges that are to be worked into the athlete’s daily life as often as possible. Suggestions will be given for ways to practice during training (e.g., in the gym or weight room) and outside of training (e.g., at home, school). These are only suggestions; it is crucial that athletes come up with meaningful strategies or techniques that work for them specifically.

Reminders: To help remember the at home and in-training workouts, it is important create reminders to be placed throughout different environments. Visual reminders (e.g., sticky notes) serve to direct attention and remind athletes to apply a practice even when they might forget (Bays, 2011). Seeing these reminders time and time again can aid in training the brain to repeatedly practice and form new, mindful habits (Eiring & Hathaway, 2012). Suggestions for how to remind athletes of mindfulness assignments are provided in each session. Again, it is encouraged that athletes come up with something that is relevant and meaningful to them. This can be done individually for personal environments (e.g., at home), and as a team for reminders that will be placed in shared environments (e.g., in the weight room or on the walls at practice). Be creative! What works for one teammate may not make sense for another and that is okay.

Tracking progress: A sample of a mindfulness tracking log is provided in the program. Athletes are encouraged to keep track of at home practice. Included in the log is the date and time of practice, length of practice, type of practice, and any comments or observations from the practice itself. This log serves as a resource to refer back on during discussions and is a concrete reminder of practice over-time. Looking back on logs at the end of the program may remind athletes of the progress they have made and inspire them to continue with their mindful journey.

Obstacles: When discussing at home practices, it is important to identify obstacles that may get in the way of consistent practice. Once these obstacles are identified, be sure to discuss ways to overcome these barriers so that practice can continue. The reminders addressed above are one way to encourage regular practice. Identifying obstacles ahead of time and discussing ways to work around the obstacles will enhance adherence to practice. These barriers are likely to change throughout the program as new reactions to experiences begin to emerge (Kaufman, Glass, &

Pineau, 2018), so it is important to consider obstacles (present or foreseen in the future) during each session.

Final thoughts: The final part of each session is a summary of the lesson. This will also provide athletes with the opportunity to ask questions in session before leaving to practice on their own for the week. Each session will conclude with a “Most valuable lesson,” which is a brief statement that relates specifically to one key aspect of the lesson.

More on Discussions

There is space built-in for discussion throughout each session. It is recommended that the leader make time at the end of each session for athletes to process the information and ask questions about material and activities. Answering questions will help smooth out any bumps before the athlete takes what is learned into their daily practice. The leader may find times where understanding is high and there are no questions. In this case, discussion points are provided within each session. These include questions for thought and reflection to make sure that the meaning and purpose of the content was received. Always take the time to discuss any points that need to be explored further.

It is likely that practicing mindfulness is new for many of the volleyball players who will use this program. Many frustrations and doubts may come up when learning this new concept of mindfulness. In responding to the questions and reactions of the athletes throughout the program, it is important that the leader practice their own mindfulness skills. Accepting what comes up in discussion with a nonjudging attitude is crucial so that athletes feel comfortable and safe when sharing their experiences. It also is a way to continue to model mindful behaviors.

For an individual who is going through this program on their own, discussions will have to be modified. The suggested modification is to substitute verbal discussion with journaling.

Use the discussion questions as writing prompts and free-write what comes to mind. Throughout this journaling process, pay less attention to grammar and spelling and more attention to writing exactly what comes to mind. Feel free to journal about experiences that are not related to the discussion questions as well. For those completing the program with others, journaling can still be used as a way to explore experiences as mindfulness skills are developed.

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Session 1: A 3-Step Approach to Training

The main goal for session 1 is getting all members participating in the program on board with mindfulness. It is crucial that athletes, coaches, and anyone else involved know the rationale behind implementing this program and understand the amount of dedication and training it will take to have the best results possible. This session is designed to introduce the concept and components of mindfulness as well as the benefits mindfulness training can have both inside and outside of sport. While there are many positive outcomes that can come from this program, this type of training demands the commitment and effort that volleyball skills and strength demand: consistent practice. The session will conclude with an introduction to awareness and breathwork.

This session includes:

- The 3-step approach: Openness, commitment, and practice
- Understanding mindfulness
- Introducing mindfulness to the team
- Start with your breath
- Taking a breath
- At home practices - need copies of mindfulness log & session summary (each week this will be needed)
- Final thoughts

The 3-Step Approach

The skill of attacking in volleyball often starts with proper mechanics in hitting form and footwork. Commonly, a 3-step approach is introduced to help the volleyball player learn attacking skills. Similarly, a 3-step approach is being introduced as the foundation for MV and

for learning and practicing mindfulness skills. This 3-step approach consists of openness, commitment, and practice.

Openness: Mindfulness practice is a new skill for many athletes. Some people may already have pre-conceived ideas about what mindfulness is and how it is practiced. While some of these ideas may be accurate, there are a lot of misunderstandings about mindfulness. It is important to be open to new ideas for mindfulness to have any benefits on personal well-being or performance. Throughout this program, athletes' definitions and perceptions of mindfulness may change, and they will be challenged in new and potentially difficult ways. Expanding and opening athletes' minds to new mental strategies is crucial for success. Being open to the exercises presented in this program will help foster growth as an athlete.

Commitment: While being open to change and new ideas is the first component, actually committing to these changes and ideas is the next step. Commitment includes buying into this program; not because coach or parents want it, but because you as an athlete are excited about the opportunity to continue to expand your potential. Commitment includes being patient. If practicing mindfulness was a quick and easy way to potentially enhance performance, everyone would be doing it. The skills discussed in this program will not develop overnight. Think of the brain as a muscle; muscles take time to become bigger and stronger. Committing to the process despite barriers that might get in the way is necessary for changes to take place.

Practice: This 3-step approach is not complete without discussing practice. Openness and commitment get the athlete there, but practice is what pushes the athlete further. Applying the exercises and skills learned is the only way to become better at them. It is through the application of formal and informal mindfulness practices where one becomes more aware of the self and the

environment. Just as with repetitions in the weight room or during passing drills, the journey to developing and fine-tuning these skills is through actual, consistent practice.

Understanding Mindfulness

Simply stated, mindfulness is intentionally paying attention, without any judgment to what one is currently experiencing (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). This includes being aware of internal thoughts (e.g., “I’m bored”) and feelings (e.g., butterflies in stomach; anxious feelings) as well as being aware of what is happening in the surrounding environment. This present-moment focus allows individuals to be connected with their mind and body in the here and now.

Mindfulness can be considered a skill (Eiring & Hathaway) just as forearm passing in volleyball is a skill. Each person has the ability to do these skills. However, individuals have different levels of mindfulness (Quaglia, Brown, Lindsay, Creswell, & Goodman, 2015) or talent for volleyball to start with. Just as forearm passing gets better with volleyball practice, mindfulness skills can improve through mindfulness practice (Quaglia et al., 2015). Some people may have more natural ability than others, but all can work on improving the skill with practice.

Mindfulness practice can take many forms. These include informal practices such as worksheets or activities and formal practices such as yoga, guided practice, and different types of meditation. Meditation is just one way to practice mindfulness but is often associated with mindfulness very closely (Eiring & Hathaway, 2012). Meditation at its simplest form is considered stopping and being present (Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

Through mindfulness practice, athletes are able to learn how to be more present in life and sport. This allows athletes to direct attention to what is important at the moment. Beyond awareness, athletes learn to become more accepting of what is happening. Accepting thoughts and feelings about an event in a nonjudgmental way allows athletes to build a sense of

compassion for themselves. This level of kindness and acceptance can influence the way athletes talk to themselves and respond in important situations. This present moment awareness and acceptance through practicing mindfulness has many benefits both on and off the court. Some of these include:

- improved emotion regulation (Arch & Landy, 2015)
- less rumination on negative thoughts (Josefsson et al., 2017)
- decreased feelings of anxiety (Röthlin, Horvath, Birrer, & Holtforth, 2016).
- changes in brain structure (e.g., decision-making; Eiring & Hathaway, 2012)
- quicker reaction time (Brown, 2015)
- improved ability to direct attention (van Vugt, 2015)

Introducing Mindfulness to the Team

Invite the group to think about this scenario:

Imagine you are tied 2-2 for sets in a tight 5-set volleyball match. Your legs are burning due to the long, intense rallies. You notice a mental battle inside your head; on one hand, you're exhausted, it's late, and your opponent seems unstoppable. You're not sure you can keep up much longer. On the other, you're telling yourself: Keep pressing, you've trained for this. The referee whistles to signal the beginning of the 5th set.

Discuss how athletes might react to this scenario. The judgments presented here (e.g., unstoppable opponent) are likely to lead to other negative reactions (e.g., giving up). One might become frustrated when thinking an opponent is unstoppable or feel more fatigued when focusing on how late it is at night. These reactions do not help athletes to pull off a win in the 5th and final set; rather, they take away from that focus.

With mindfulness, athletes learn to pay attention without judgment. Using the example above, a mindful athlete acknowledges (i.e., accepts) feelings of fatigue but does not judge these feelings as good or bad. Further, the mindful athlete does not label the opponent as “unstoppable” (i.e., withdraws judgment) and does not focus on what time it is going to be when the match is over (i.e., stays present). Rather, the athlete practicing mindfulness takes a moment to listen to their breath, allowing them to become grounded in the present moment. The mindful athlete focuses their attention on accepting their present state, and places attention on the important information (e.g., the whistle, the ball, the play). This way, mental energy and focus can be placed on the present-moment performance and what can directly be controlled by the athlete instead of on distractions. The player is simply playing volleyball; not winning, not losing, not failing. Mindfulness training can help direct this type of attention during performance.

Playing in the zone: Allow discussion to move into a sharing of experiences about playing “in the zone” (Mack & Casstevens, 2001). Have athletes recall a time when they were feeling flawless in performance and everything was happening effortlessly. Invite athletes to close their eyes and take a few moments to travel back to this experience. Where were they? How did it feel? What were they doing? Some common characteristics of playing in the zone include having a great performance, distortion of time (e.g., speeding up or slowing down), complete focus, and no thinking (Krane, Williams, & Graupensperger, in press). Take a few minutes to have athletes share their experiences. Remembering these performances may bring back good feelings and remind athletes of their potential.

Another term for being “in the zone” is “flow”. This flow experience is sought after by athletes at all levels in all types of sports. Several of the key factors associated with flow have been linked to factors associated with being mindful (Mannion, in press). Mindful practices may

increase the likelihood of achieving this flow state where optimal performance exists (Schwanhausser, 2009).

Greats who practice mindfulness: Depending on the athlete or team, research and definitions may only go so far. Beyond providing the rationale for how mindfulness can help with sport performance, a few real-life examples are given in this section. This is done so athletes can relate and see first-hand that these practices are not just some odd trend that their leader wants them to try. Rather, elite level athletes practice these skills as well. Now introducing: Michael Jordan, Kerri Walsh-Jennings, and Dustin Watten.

When all-star Michael Jordan was playing with the Chicago Bulls, he and his teammates worked with George Mumford, a meditation teacher (Kamphoff, 2018). One of the goals through meditation training was to be able to get into that place during performance where everything was in flow. This was a quiet space in performance where Jordan noted being able to see the court well, read defensive plays, stay positive, and never doubt himself (Kamphoff, 2018).

Kerri Walsh Jennings is considered one of the best beach volleyball players of all time, having won three consecutive Olympic gold medals (Kamphoff, 2018). Her most recent medal came from a satisfying victory to win the bronze medal against a number one ranked team after her first Olympic loss in over a decade (Kamphoff, 2018). Jennings practices yoga before she plays as a way to connect with her breath and anchor her feet beneath her (Barnes, 2017).

Dustin Watten may not be a household name, but he has largely credited mindfulness to his successes in volleyball. He is the libero for Team USA's men's indoor volleyball team. Not only does he practice mindfulness and forms of meditation himself, but he uses social media as a platform to educate others about mindfulness and its place within volleyball. Beyond his

personal Instagram account (@dustinwatten) where he shares his mindful practices in volleyball, he recently created an account promoting mindfulness to all athletes (@themindfulathlete).

At the conclusion of this section, athletes should have a general understanding for what mindfulness is and why it is important for sport. Take the time to engage in discussion as needed. Remind athletes to remain open to ideas that are new to them and to trust that with commitment and practice, they can increase their ability to be mindful. Check-in with athletes before moving on to the next section. Athletes should at minimum have a basic understanding of:

- what mindfulness is
- how mindfulness may help sport performance
- mindfulness as a skill
- the connection between mindfulness and flow

Start with Your Breath

The breath is one thing that is always present. A short “start with your breath” exercise will be the opening to each of the sessions in this program:

Begin by tuning in to your breath, just as is it. Notice the pace of your breathing (e.g., fast, slow), how it sounds (e.g., loud, soft), how it feels (e.g., in your nose, stomach, or shoulders). Is it shallow or deep? Do not attempt to change or alter your breath in any way, but rather meet it where it is at. Do this for one minute.

Have a brief discussion about this experience of tuning into the breath. Some athletes may have a difficult time with this exercise (sitting still for one minute; that’s absurd!). It is important to emphasize simply noticing what is happening. Avoid judging or comparing what happened during the experience to what happened during other peoples’ experiences. When the mind does wander from the task at hand, it is easy to be angry or upset for being distracted.

However, maintaining the presence of having no judgment is important. Notice that thoughts have drifted, and gently bring them back to the breath. Just as athletes are unable to go to the weight room and squat their heaviest weight on the very first try, they may not be able to harness these mental skills right away. Every moment spent practicing, is another moment spent getting mentally stronger. Some points for discussion include:

- What was the experience like for you?
- What did you notice about your breath?
- What were you thinking about during this one minute?
- Did you get distracted? If so, were you able to return to focusing on your breath?

Taking a Breath

While we breathe all day, our breath is often automatic and unnoticed. However, paying attention and even working to regulate breathing in one way or another can help to control the pace and rhythm of our breath and endure the benefits that are a result of all of this. Invite athletes to consider this example:

When you finish a long rally, you may be breathing heavily. Between all of the transitions, footwork, jumping, and diving to the ground, you grow tired and your breath resembles this: it is heavy and loud. On the other hand, imagine yourself just waking up from a nap; your breath is most likely slow and steady.

Learning to control and manage our breath is important, but first it is important to consider *how* to take a proper, deep breath. A deep breath comes not from the shoulders, but from the stomach, or diaphragm.

Deep breath script: As always, modify the script as needed to fit a particular team. As long as the importance of the message is conveyed, leaders can (and are encouraged) to get creative with

the execution and application of exercises throughout this program. The following script was modified from MSPE (Kaufman et al., 2018) and is approximately 2-3 minutes.

Start by laying on your back and place a nearby object on your stomach (nothing too heavy, e.g., your shoe). As you lay on the ground and breathe, notice the shoe on your stomach rising up when you inhale and lowering down during your exhale. Just watch and notice this. Do not alter the natural rhythm of your breathing. Accept your breath just as it is. Pay attention to how your stomach feels moving up and down. Is it rising and falling consistently? Does the inhale or the exhale take longer? If the object on your stomach does not work for you, you can simply place your hand on your stomach as you breathe.

Now, try to push the shoe a little higher with each breath. Slowly, fill your stomach with more air as you make the shoe rise slightly more with each breath. Feel the air coming into your stomach first, then your chest, and lastly your shoulders. Notice as the breath travels through each of these three locations in your body.

Once you feel you have reached your capacity with the inhale, try to sink the shoe down lower and lower with each exhale, pulling your belly button back toward your spine. Push the air down from your chest into your belly and down toward your spine. When you feel you have reached your full exhale, return your breathing to its natural rhythm. Notice any differences between your breath now and when you first started this exercise. Continue to focus on your breath, accepting it just as it is.

Breath discussion:

As a group, discuss the different experiences and reactions that occurred during this first breathing exercise. A few questions for consideration are:

- What was it like expanding your inhale and exhale?
- What did you notice during this exercise?
- Were you able to keep your focus on your breath?
- How might this exercise play a role in volleyball?

Remember to be mindful (e.g., nonjudgmental) when responding to athlete's comments about the exercise. It is common for those beginning a mindfulness practice to wonder if they are doing it right or wrong (Kaufman et al., 2018). Athletes (who are not used to sitting still) may comment about not being able to focus or feeling that the exercise is a waste of time. Use these opportunities to continue to discuss the application of mindfulness. These expectations and potential frustrations are all judgments of the experience. Kaufman and colleagues (2018) suggest reframing these types of interpretations to acknowledge that the mind is going to wander but recognizing this is part of being aware and being present.

At Home Practices

The first session is near complete and now the focus must shift to incorporating these practices into other parts of the athlete's life throughout the upcoming week. Just like volleyball players practice and weight train more than once a week for best results, mental skills need consistent practice to see the most growth as well. It is recommended that athletes practice the deep breath script 4 times before the next session.

Elephant: This week's elephant exercise is titled "Just three breaths" (Bays, 2011, p. 76).

Throughout the day, simply pause and take three deep breaths. It may help to pick a regularly occurring event from the day to pair the three deep breaths with. For example, every time the phone rings, or each time you enter the locker room, pause for a few moments and just breathe. Place a hand on your stomach to feel the rise of the belly with each inhale and the fall with each

exhale. For this moment, bring your attention only to your breathing. Notice how you feel afterward and continue on with your day or repeat for another count of three. Thank yourself for taking the time out of your busy day to be calm and present with your mind and body.

Tracking progress: At the end of each session, a mindfulness log (Appendix A) will be passed out for athletes to track their practice throughout the week. This log is provided as a general template and it is encouraged for individuals to modify the log as needed. Tracking progress this way may aid with accountability and adherence to the program. Additionally, athletes are encouraged to bring their log with them to each session so that they can reference it during discussions and address any questions, concerns, or observations that they may have had throughout the week.

Reminders: Starting new habits can have its difficulties. There are a number of ways to help build reminders into day-to-day life. These reminders serve as cues in the environment to remind an individual to be mindful. A few examples will be discussed, but it is encouraged that athletes develop strategies that will be helpful for them in their practice.

Visual reminders can include using index cards or sticky notes to write down what it is the athlete would like to remember (e.g., 3 breaths). These can be placed on mirrors, next to the bed, or on the steering wheel; anywhere to catch the eye. Having a place to hang and display the mindfulness log where it is seen each day can be a reminder to practice. Some individuals may want to set alarms on phones or computers with a note reminding them to practice or just to breathe. Having a friend to help with accountability can be a great way to adhere to goals and at home practices as well.

Final Thoughts

The first session can be overwhelming for everyone involved. Athletes are challenged to try something new and potentially out of their comfort zone. Leaders may be wondering if they did a good job sharing the information in a way that can be understood and is exciting. Remind everyone (i.e., athletes and leaders) to not judge these feelings and thoughts, but rather to acknowledge that they exist and discuss them as needed. A quick review of the 3-step approach and how mindfulness practice can benefit volleyball performance is encouraged.

The conclusion is a great time to do a last check for understanding. It is important that athletes are competent in what they need to do moving forward into the week. Mindfully address any concerns that might come up while reinforcing the lesson of the session. Be sure to distribute the mindfulness logs to each individual before they leave.

Most valuable lesson: Openness, commitment, and practice are crucial for the most success in this program.

Session 2: Taking a Timeout

This session will build on the breathwork discussed in session 1 by adding the concept of the pause or what will be referred to as a “timeout.” Beginning with a discussion of acting on autopilot, this session will move athletes toward separating a stimuli or event from their automatic reaction. By taking a timeout, athletes can begin to make intentional decisions that align with their goals.

This session includes:

- Start with your breath
- Practice discussion
- Taking a pause
- Candy Exercise (Kaufman et al., Pineau, 2018) – need candy for activity
- At home practices
- Final thoughts

Start with Your Breath

Each session will begin with this exercise introduced in session 1. Allow athletes to settle into their seats or lay on the floor, wherever comfortable, and guide them to start by simply being with their breath for 1 minute.

Begin by tuning in to your breath, just as is it. Notice the pace of your breathing (e.g., fast, slow), how it sounds (e.g., loud, soft), how it feels (e.g., in your nose, stomach, or shoulders). Is it shallow or deep? Do not attempt to change or alter your breath in any way, but rather meet it where it is at. Do this for one minute.

Have a short discussion (2-3 minutes) on this experience. Some things to consider are as follows:

- What changes do you notice with yourself before and after this exercise?

- Was this exercise any different from the last time you completed it?
- Why might this be an important exercise for volleyball?

Practice Discussion

Invite athletes to have a discussion about their first week of practicing at home. It is recommended to spend 5-10 minutes on this discussion, but there may be reflections and observations that require more time. Athletes may lead the direction of the conversation based on their own experiences. If needed, suggestions for conversation include:

- What was your experience following the deep breath script?
- Discuss your experiences with the elephant exercise (*just three breaths*).
- What reminders did you use that worked? What ones didn't?
- What kind of thoughts or reactions did you notice throughout the week?
- What were some barriers that got in the way of your practice? How did you overcome them?

Some athletes may have similar experiences to others on the team and some athletes may have completely different experiences. Remind athletes not to compare their experiences to the person next to them. To be nonjudging is to accept the experiences as they are, no matter how similar or different they may be from another's experience. However, it might be comforting for some to know that they are not the only ones who may have struggled with a particular concept or barrier. Additionally, athletes can learn from one another when sharing about reminder ideas that may have been successful for them.

Taking a Pause

As you may have learned doing the elephant exercise, there are not many times throughout the day where people pause and just exist with our breath. More often, as a society,

we move from task to task on autopilot, without ever really considering what is going on in the moment. Our behaviors are learned reactions to certain events. For example, if a volleyball player has a sub-par warm-up before a competition, she may automatically think that her competition performance will also be sub-par. This automatic thought may then lead to other reactions (e.g., stress, frustration) that will not facilitate a great performance but most likely impede on it. This is where the pause or timeout comes in.

Pausing allows athletes to examine what is happening in the moment. Think about why coaches call timeouts. Usually the momentum is with the other team or the coach (coming from a different perspective or viewpoint than the athlete) notices something new that needs to be applied. This timeout stops the flow of play and gives coach the time needed to re-focus the athlete's attention on better choices. Pausing interrupts the automatic thinking and behaviors that often follow an event. This space makes room for the choice to think or behave in a more beneficial way.

Invite athletes to think of times where they may act on autopilot. Consider these questions: Is it always beneficial? Are you aware of what is happening presently? By learning to pause and be present through the breath, athletes can learn to make choices for what they need right now, in this present moment.

Candy Exercise

One of the activities in which people often engage while on autopilot is eating. This can be seen when from eating out of boredom or eating until uncomfortably full. Additionally, people do many other things while they eat. Ask the athletes to think of their meals in the last 24 hours and share what they were doing *while* they were eating. Answers may include texting, watching TV, talking, driving, walking, reading, and so on. Engaging in these other activities

while eating implies that they are not fully in the moment. The following candy exercise is an introduction to what it is like to insert a timeout before eating.

This activity will challenge athletes to be fully present while they are eating. Leaders should be sure to check for any allergies before beginning. Small candy pieces that usually get eaten in large quantities (e.g., Skittles, M&Ms) are good for this exercise. Place the candy in a bowl in the center of the group and instruct the group to not eat the candies yet. After prepping the group for the exercise, allow the athletes to select one piece of candy and hold it in the palm of their hand. The following script³ is from Kaufman et al. (2018, p. 70-71):

Look down at this candy and view it as if you have never seen such a thing before. See the shape. Is it perfectly proportioned or lopsided? Notice the colors and the way the light hits its surface. Pretend that this candy is totally foreign to you. Let your eyes slowly and carefully explore every part of it. (*Pause for 5 seconds.*)

Feel the candy resting in your hand, and sense its weight. Now, feel its texture, perhaps as you slowly turn the candy over with your fingers. If, at any point while doing this, you find yourself asking questions such as, What's the point of this? What's this weird exercise we're doing? or When can I eat this? then just note these questions as thoughts and gently escort your attention back to the candy in your hand.

Now, smell the candy, perhaps holding it just beneath your nose. With each in-breath that you take, see if you can find the candy's unique scent. Notice what thoughts or memories arise when you take in that particular smell and just let those thoughts glide in and out of your mind as you return your awareness to the candy. (*5 seconds*)

³ “Object” used in original script (Kaufman et al., 2018) has been changed to “candy” for the purpose of this program.

Now, take the candy between your thumb and index finger. As you hold it, bring it toward your face, but do not place it in your mouth. Observe what reactions begin to occur. Do you feel your mouth start to water? Do you sense a desire to eat this thing? Once you have noted any reactions, bring the candy away from your mouth once again.

Take another careful look at the candy. Then, slowly begin moving the candy toward your mouth once more, maybe noticing how your hand knows just where to go or any physical reactions to the candy's approach. Close your eyes and gently place the candy in your mouth and, without chewing, explore how the candy feels sitting on your tongue. Let it just sit there. (*10 seconds*) When you feel ready, slowly, with full awareness, begin chewing and observe the taste. Pause for a moment as you chew, noticing how the conditions in your mouth and the consistency of the candy are changing. If pieces get stuck in your teeth, observe the sensations of your tongue getting them out.

Notice when you feel the urge to swallow, perhaps sensing how strong or automatic this urge can be. And, as you swallow, see if you can track the process as the candy leaves your mouth. Try to sense how you are reacting to having eaten this candy. What thoughts does eating this particular candy, with this particular taste, bring to your mind? Can you notice within yourself a desire or a craving for more? As best you can, bring a gentle curiosity to these observations. Be with this experience fully: physically, mentally, and emotionally. (*10 seconds*)

Now, take...[another candy]... and place it in the palm of your hand. I want you to again proceed through these same steps, consciously seeing, feeling, smelling, and then tasting the candy before swallowing it, and noticing any changes that occur in your body. In this instance, however, go through these steps in your own time, observing any

thoughts or reactions that come to mind and then, as best you can, letting them go and gently, mindfully escorting your attention back to the candy. (*10 seconds*)

Reflect on how this one candy can be experienced so differently and so much more deeply. Recognize your ability to experience life richly, and notice how all that is needed are a few calm, mindful moments. When you have finished, please open your eyes.

Candy exercise discussion: Allow time for discussion of reactions and experiences following the activity. Some suggestions for discussion include:

- What reactions or thoughts did you have during this activity?
- How was this activity different from how you might normally eat?
- How could this activity be related to volleyball?

Throughout this program, it will be important to continually bring the focus of discussions back to sport and specifically volleyball. There should be a clear connection and understanding of how these exercises can play a role in being mindful in the sport environment. For example, how can taking a pause before eating relate to pausing during volleyball? What automatic reactions typically occur at practice or during competition that could use a timeout? This activity used a highly automatic activity such as eating and implemented a pause to become a slower and more thoughtful process. This allows individuals to be more present with the moment and to notice what is occurring with thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

At Home Practices

For formal practice this week, complete the deep breath script 4 times before the next session.

Elephant: “When eating, just eat” (Bays, 2011, p. 33) is the title of this week’s elephant exercise. This practice mimics the behaviors of the candy exercise, but challenges individuals to incorporate this way of eating into their everyday life. Throughout the week, the challenge is to simply eat when eating. Set the time aside to enjoy the smells, flavors, and textures of the food. Avoid reading, talking, walking, etc. while eating or drinking. While eating may seem like a good time to multitask and get some other things accomplished, intentionally use these moments to be present with food.

Additionally, take the 3 breaths elephant exercise from last week and incorporate it into a daily routine. Have these 3 breaths be the pause or timeout that encourage more presence and less autopilot. Do it before brushing teeth or before answering the phone. Create these timeouts consistently throughout the day.

Tracking progress: Be sure to pass out another copy of the mindfulness log (Appendix B) to each athlete. Remind athletes that this log is a general template for tracking progress. It is encouraged for individuals to modify the log as needed. Keep in mind that it takes time to build productive habits, just as it takes time to change poor habits. Encourage athletes to continue to try tracking their progress even if it did not go as expected for the first week. Finally, athletes are encouraged to bring their log with them to each session so that they can reference it during discussions and address any questions, concerns, or observations that they may have had throughout the week.

Reminders: Individuals may want to alter reminders that did not work last week or continue with the ones that did. Reminders and alarms on the phone or computer can be great for adding pauses into the day. If athletes start to get used to a reminder being there, make an effort to change it so it catches the eye once again.

Final Thoughts

Incorporating a pause into the day like a timeout is used in a game, can be useful for separating the response that typically follows a reaction to an event. Creating this space allows time to be present in the current moment experience. Eventually, athletes will learn to make decisions that align with these present-moment needs and be able to form new, beneficial habits. Notice times in sport and life at home where reactions occur without any thinking. Encourage athletes to think about where they can insert a timeout and how this might benefit them.

Most valuable lesson: Create moments of clarity and presence by adding the pause to everyday life.

Session 3: Body Awareness

Now that athletes have worked on building an awareness of breath, the focus in session 3 will shift to awareness in relation to the body. Through the use of a body scan, athletes will be taught to become more aware of the way their body is communicating to them via feeling. Muscle tension and relaxation will be discussed in relation to stress and performance as athletes learn to listen to what their body is constantly telling them.

This session includes:

- Start with your breath
- Practice discussion
- Mind-body connection
- Progressive muscle relaxation and body scan
- At home practices
- Final thoughts

Start with Your Breath

Begin by starting with your breath (session 1). Allow athletes to settle into their seats or lay on the floor, wherever comfortable, and guide them to simply be with their breath for 1 minute. If needed, have a short discussion (2-3 minutes) on this experience. Consider how this exercise may change for athletes as their practice continues.

Practice Discussion

Invite athletes to have a discussion about their at home practice. It is recommended to spend 5-10 minutes on this discussion, but there may be reflections and observations that require more time. Suggestions for conversation include:

- What was your experience following the deep breath script?

- What reminders did you use that worked? What ones didn't?
- Discuss your experiences with the elephant exercise (when eating, just eat).
- What were some barriers that got in the way of your practice? How did you overcome them?

Mind-body Connection

The mind and body are influenced by each other. Thoughts produced in the mind can lead to certain feelings or sensations in the body. To drive in an example, invite athletes to imagine an athletic experience and take note on how it makes their body feel using the following script:

Take a full, deep breath and close your eyes. Tune into your breathing for a few breaths and begin to relax yourself. After a few moments, think of a time when you were extremely scared or nervous about performing. Re-create this experience in your mind with as much detail as possible. Think about what you looked like, where you were, and what noises you could hear. Remember why you were nervous or scared for this performance. Take yourself back in time fully and re-live this experience. *Pause.* Now, notice any sensations in your body. Notice your heart rate. Notice feelings in your stomach and throughout your body. Pay attention to sensations such as sweating, butterflies, or muscle tension. *Pause for 5 seconds.*

Take another full, deep breath and erase this image completely. Return your thinking back to your breath. *Pause for 10 seconds.* Now, think of a time when you were having fun and performing at your best. Re-create this experience in your mind with as much detail as possible. Think about what you looked like, where you were, and what noises you could hear. Remember why this was your best performance. Take yourself back in time fully and re-live this experience. *Pause.* Now, notice any sensations in your

body. Notice your heartrate. Notice feelings in your stomach and throughout your body. Pay attention to sensations such as sweating, butterflies, or relaxed muscles. *Pause for 5 seconds.*

Now turn your attention back to your breath. Breathe in and out deeply 3 times. Slowly open your eyes and return back to the room.

This script explores the connection between thinking and feeling. An alternate to using imagery with this script is asking athletes to think about and draw what these experiences were like. The drawing can include a picture of the experience along with words that relate to how the athlete was feeling or what they were thinking. Other types of emotions and performances can be used to help make this point if the examples provided do not work for a particular athlete (Eiring & Hathaway, 2012). When athletes think about an experience from the past, there can be strong feelings that surface within the body. Have a discussion about the types of feelings and sensations athletes experienced during this exercise. Simply thinking about an experience can induce certain feelings, even if that experience is completely in the past. This is a great example of how minds and bodies are connected.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation and Body Scan

Similar experiences are found when we think of relaxing times. Relaxing the mind can relax the body. The converse is true as well, relaxing the body can help to relax the mind. Breathing deep and helping oxygen flow through the system is one way to physically induce feelings and thoughts of relaxation (Baldock, Hanton, Mellalieu, & Williams, in press). The following exercises can be used to physically and mentally relax via the mind-body connection.

Progressive muscle relaxation: Also known as PR, progressive muscle relaxation is a tool that focuses on noticing the difference between relaxed muscles and tense muscles. By contrasting

these feelings, one can become more aware of how different parts of the body feels. By practicing PR, one can feel where tension exists in their body and then work to relax that area of the body. The following PR script takes about 30 minutes to complete. It is important to note that if an individual has any injured or severely sore body parts to skip that area of the body in the script. Tensing sore or injured muscles can lead to further injury.

“Sit or lie down in a comfortable position and try to put yourself in a relaxed state. Close your eyes and take a long, slow, deep breath through your nose, inhaling as much air as you can. Then exhale slowly and completely, feel the tension leaving your body as you exhale. Take another deep breath and let the day’s tensions and problems drain out of you with the exhalation. [Pause.] Relax as much as possible and listen to what I say. Remember not to strain to relax. Just let it happen. During the session, try not to move any more than necessary to stay comfortable. Particularly, try not to move muscles that have already been relaxed.

As we progress through each of 12 muscle groups, you will first tense the muscle group for approximately 5 to 7 seconds and then relax for 20–30 seconds. Do not start the tensing until I say ‘NOW.’ Continue to tense until I say ‘OKAY’ or ‘RELAX,’ at which time immediately let go of all the tension.

Begin with tensing the muscles in your dominant hand and lower arm by making a tight fist and bending your hand back at the wrist NOW. Feel the tension in the hand and up into the lower arm. . . . Okay, relax by simply letting go of the tension. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation [pause 20 to 30 seconds]. . . . Make another fist NOW [pause 5 to 7 seconds]. Okay, relax. Just let the relaxation happen by stopping the contraction; don’t put out any effort [pause 25 to 30 seconds].

Next tense the muscles of the dominant upper arm by pushing your elbow down against the floor or back of the chair. Tense NOW. Feel the tension in the biceps without involving the muscles in the lower arm and hand. . . . Okay, release the tension all at once, not gradually. Just let it happen. Let it all go. . . . Tense NOW. . . . Okay, release it. Contrast the difference between tension and letting go into relaxation. Relaxation is no more than the absence of tension.

With your nondominant hand, make a tight fist and bend your wrist back NOW. Feel the tension in your hand and lower arm, but keep the upper arm relaxed. . . . Okay, relax by simply draining all of the tension out. . . . NOW tense again. . . . Okay, relax and feel the difference between the tension and relaxation. . . . NOW push the elbow down or back to tighten the nondominant upper arm. . . . Okay, relax. . . . NOW tense the upper arm again. Note the discomfort. . . . RELAX. Let all the tension dissolve away. . . . Enjoy the feelings of relaxation. . . . Notice the sensations you have in the muscles of both arms and hands. . . . Perhaps there is a sort of flow of relaxation—perhaps a feeling of warmth and even heaviness in these muscles. Notice and enjoy this feeling of relaxation.

Turn your attention to the muscles in your face. Tense the muscles in your forehead by raising your eyebrows NOW. Feel the tension in your forehead and scalp. (Pause for only 3- to 5-second contractions with these smaller muscle groups.) Okay, relax and smooth it out. . . . Enjoy the spreading sensation of relaxation. . . . NOW frown again. . . . RELAX. Allow your forehead to become smooth again. . . . Your forehead should feel smooth as glass. . . .

Next squint your eyes very tightly and at the same time pucker your lips and clench your teeth, but not so tightly that it hurts. Tense NOW. Feel the tension. . . . Okay,

relax. . . . Let the tension dissolve away. . . . NOW tense again. . . . Okay, let all the tension go. . . . Your lips may part slightly as your cheeks and jaw relax.

Next tense the muscles of the neck and shoulders by raising your shoulders upward as high as you can while pulling your neck down into your shoulders. Tense NOW. . . . feel the discomfort. . . . RELAX. Drop your shoulders back down and feel the relaxation spreading through your neck, throat, and shoulders. . . . Let go more and more. . . . Tense NOW by raising your shoulders and sinking your neck. . . . Okay, relax. Let go more and more. Enjoy the deepening sensation of relaxation. . . . Remember relaxation is simply the absence of tension.

Next tighten your abdomen as though you expect a punch while simultaneously squeezing the buttocks together. Tense NOW. You should feel a good deal of tightness and tension in the stomach and buttocks. . . . RELAX, release the tension, let it all drain out. Just let it happen. . . . NOW tense again. . . . Okay, relax. Feel the spreading sensation of relaxation. Let go more and more. . . .

Turn your attention to your legs. Tighten the muscles in your thighs by simultaneously contracting all the muscles of your thighs. Tense NOW. Try to localize the tension only to your thighs. . . . Note the sensation. Okay, relax. Contrast the tension and relaxation sensations. Remember relaxation is merely the absence of tension; it takes no effort except merely releasing the tension. . . . NOW tighten the thighs again. . . . Okay, release the tension—just passively let it drain out. Enjoy the feeling of relaxation. . . .

Next flex your ankle as though you are trying to touch your toes to your shin. Tense NOW. You should be feeling tension all through your calf, ankle, and foot. Contrast this tension with when you tensed the thigh. Okay, relax. Simply release the tension; let go of

any remaining tension. . . . NOW tense again. . . . Okay, slowly release all the tension. . . .

Next straighten your legs and point your toes downward. Tense NOW. Note the discomfort. . . . Okay, relax. Feel the spreading sensation of relaxation as you relax deeper and deeper. . . . NOW straighten your legs. . . . RELAX. Release all the tension. Let go more and more. . . .

Relax all the muscles of your body—let them all go limp. You should be breathing slowly and deeply. Let all last traces of tension drain out of your body. You may notice a sensation of warmth and heaviness throughout your body, as though you are sinking deeper and deeper into the chair or floor. Or you may feel as though you are as light as air, as though you are floating on a cloud. Whatever feelings you have, go with them. . . . Enjoy the sensation of relaxation. . . . Relax deeper and deeper. . . . Scan your body for any places that might still feel tension. Wherever you feel tension, do an additional tense and relax.

Before opening your eyes, take several deep breaths and feel the energy and alertness flowing back into your body. Stretch your arms and legs if you wish. Open your eyes when you are ready.” (from Baldock et al., in press).

Progressive muscle relaxation discussion: Begin a discussion of the PR exercise just completed. Encourage athletes to think about what the entire experience was like. If individuals had a difficult time with certain muscle groups, work together to adjust some of the wording of the script to make it more comfortable and fitting for those individuals. Remind athletes that as with all of the other skills in this program, consistent practice is needed to get better at noticing differences in these various parts of the body. Some points for discussion include:

- What differences do you notice in your mind and body now versus before the relaxation exercise?

- What thoughts or feelings did you notice come up during the exercise?
- How and when might PR be applied to volleyball?

Body scan: Simply put, a body scan is a way to search the body for certain feelings or sensations. For the purpose of MV, athletes are searching for feelings of muscle tension. Once a place of tension has been found, take a deep breath and place focus on relaxation this area of the body. Scanning the body and muscle groups for tension will become easier the more one practices PR. Ideally, the body scan will be used during competition or incorporated into part of the athlete's routine (e.g., pre-serve). To complete a body scan:

“Quickly scan the body from head to toe (or toe to head), stop only at muscle groups where the tension level is too high, and release the tension [with a breath] and continue the scan down (or up) the body.” (Baldock et al., in press)

At Home Practices

For formal practice, complete the PR script 3 times before the next session. This script is longer than previous practices, so be sure to set aside enough time to get the entire exercise done without feeling rushed. It may help to schedule a time in advance. On the days where PR is not practiced this week, engage in a body scan at least one time (i.e., 4 times in the next week).

Elephant: The elephant exercise for the upcoming week is titled, “Using your non-dominant hand” (Bays, 2011, p.19). This exercise challenges athletes to complete various tasks (e.g., brushing teeth, eating) throughout the week using their non-dominant hand. This experience forces individuals to really concentrate on and pay attention to the feelings associated with doing a task unnaturally. This elephant complements the other exercises in this session by heightening awareness of the body and its movements.

Tracking progress: Leaders should pass out another copy of the mindfulness log and remind athletes to continue tracking their progress each week.

Reminders: New reminders should be implemented as new tasks and exercises are assigned. Have athletes tie a string around their toothbrush or wear a rubber band around the wrist of their non-dominant hand to remind them of the elephant challenge. To continue with the habit of pausing, keep reminders and alarms on the phone or computer. If athletes start to get used to a reminder being there, make an effort to change it so it catches the eye once again.

Final Thoughts

Becoming aware of the body and the way it feels is one way to harness feelings in the present moment. Tension in the body can lead to feelings of stress and tension in the mind. Therefore, relaxing muscles through PR and body scans is a way for athletes to ease and relax the mind.

Most valuable lesson: Listen to the body by becoming more connected to present moment experiences.

Session 4: Mindful Stretching

Awareness of a still body is one thing, but awareness during movement is much more complicated. This phase of training incorporates slight movements into the mindfulness training regime while continuing to build on already learned mindfulness skills. Simple stretching and yoga movements will be taught as a way for athletes to pay attention to their moving bodies.

This session includes:

- Start with your breath
- Practice discussion
- Mindful stretching
- At home practices
- Final thoughts

Start with Your Breath

Begin by starting with your breath (session 1). Allow athletes to settle into their seats or lay on the floor, wherever comfortable, and guide them to start by simply being with their breath for 1 minute. If needed, have a short discussion (2-3 minutes) on this experience. Consider how this exercise may change for athletes as their practice continues.

Practice Discussion

Invite athletes to have a discussion about their at home practice. It is recommended to spend 5-10 minutes on this discussion, but there may be reflections and observations that require more time. Suggestions for conversation include:

- What changes have you noticed in your PR practice?
- What obstacles did you face with practicing this week? How did you overcome them?

- Discuss your experiences with using your non-dominant hand.
- What observations have you made about how the mind and the body are connected?

Mindful Stretching

To advance the mind-body connection, athletes will be introduced to mindful stretching. Mindful stretching includes being present with both the body and breath while stretching. It is encouraged that athletes use any part of their warm-up and/or cool down routine that includes stationary stretching as the basis for practicing this. For example, if athletes typically stretch at the end of a training or practice as part of a cool-down, they simply will have to add the mindfulness component to this since the stretching is already part of a routine. Instead of conversing with other teammates or taking off your equipment while stretching during this time, encourage athletes to tune their focus into their breath. Breathe in and out deeply during each stretch and pay attention to the sensations being experienced in the body, without judgment. Here is one example of a mindful stretch:

1. Slowly bend at the waist and lean forward, let your arms hang towards the floor.
2. Feel the stretch in your lower back and legs.
3. Notice any sensations as you stretch. Be aware of them without judgment, just experience the moment.
4. Simply notice the feelings and sensations (Mannion, in press).

There are many ways to include mindfulness into stretching routines, so it is encouraged that athletes use stretches and movements that are familiar and beneficial for them. Incorporate mindful stretching into a routine that is already established for easy transition. Remember to

notice sensations and feelings without any judgment. Avoid identifying stretching as boring or muscles as sore and just let them exist as they are.

Mindful yoga: A more formal type of mindful stretching is mindful yoga. Mindful yoga is similar to mindful stretching but includes slight movements. These movements often get paired with the breath to link the mind and body together as one. Simply practicing yoga has physical benefits such as increases in flexibility and strength, but practicing yoga mindfully can also harness present moment experiences of body sensations by connecting different movements to the breath (Kaufman et al., 2018). Through continued practice, athletes will learn to better listen to their bodies. Like the body scan and PR, mindful yoga allows individuals to slow down and pay attention to different sensations in the body (e.g., muscle tension) and is another step toward learning to become more mindful in motion.

Mindful yoga script:

“Slowly, with full awareness, come to your hands and knees. (*5 seconds*) As you inhale, drop your belly forward as you arch your back, sticking your tailbone up toward the sky. *Cow pose*. As you exhale, round your spine, drop your head, tuck your tailbone. *Cat pose*. Inhale, lift the head, drop the belly, lift the tailbone. Cow. Exhale, round the spine, press the mat away with the palms of your hands as you drop the head and tuck the tailbone. Cat. Take a few more cat/cow movements. Pay careful attention to the sensations as your body shifts between these postures. In the background, as best you can, try also to maintain awareness of your breath entering and leaving your body. Allow the breath to lead your motion. (*10 seconds*)

Come to rest again on your hands and knees. Inhale as you slowly lift your right arm out to the side. Notice the muscles in the shoulders and arm that engage to allow this

motion. As you exhale, thread that arm underneath you, bringing your right shoulder and your right cheek to the mat. *Thread the needle*. Hips stay lifted and are not resting on the heels here. Take three deep breaths and feel the sensations of this pose. Notice the contact points between your shoulder and cheek against the ground. Notice any constriction that may be present in the belly, and as best you can, release this tightness with each exhalation. (5 seconds) Gently rise back up and thread the needle to the other side, bringing the left shoulder and the left cheek to the mat. Take three deep breaths here and tune into the feeling of this pose. (5 seconds)

Rise back to the hands and knees, tuck your toes, lift your hips up and back for *downward facing dog*. It's okay if your heels do not touch the ground, but continue to feel the sensation of the heels falling toward the ground, allowing the hamstrings to lengthen. Spread your fingers wide, with your middle finger pointing directly in front of you. Relax the shoulders. Roll the upper arms away from you so that the shoulder blades roll toward the outer edges of the back. As you hold this pose, notice the sensations it creates in your hamstrings and low back. With these sensations held in your awareness, imagine yourself sending your breath into these muscles as you inhale. Imagine these muscles filling along with your belly, gently expanding with the in-breath and, as you exhale, feel their gentle deflation as you let go. Now, bend one knee as you stretch through the heel of your opposite foot. (5 seconds) Switch sides. Take three deep breaths here to wake up your hamstrings and calves. (5 seconds)

Slowly walk your feet forward to meet your hands, bending you knees as much as you need to. When you arrive, hang forward in a *standing forward bend*. Allow the head to be relaxed on the neck, maybe shaking it yes, shaking it no. Take a few breaths here,

and notice how you can go deeper and deeper into the pose with each out-breath.

Experience the subtle letting-go that happens with each exhalation. (*5 seconds*) Now, bend your knees deeply, and slowly roll all the way up to *mountain pose*. Notice what you are feeling as your body moves, engaging the various muscles that flex and relax to change your positioning. Glance down and make any adjustments required to bring your feet parallel to the sides of the mat. (*5 seconds*) Relax your shoulders, feeling them fall away from the ears. Come back to your intention. If you find yourself questioning why you are doing this exercise or having thoughts about past events or where you are going next, gently escort your attention back to this moment. (*10 seconds*)” (from Kaufman et al., 2018, pp. 99-100)

Mindful stretching and mindful yoga discussion: Slowing down and really experiencing stretching might be a new concept for many people. After going through the mindful stretching session and practicing mindful yoga, discuss what this process was like with the athletes. Some points for discussion include:

- What were your experiences during mindful stretching and/or mindful yoga?
- How do you feel now that you have completed these exercises?
- How might you apply these exercises to volleyball?

Take note that some individuals may have difficulty staying focused for a period of time. Remind these individuals that it is okay for the mind to wander; just gently bring the mind back to focusing on the breath. Stretching is a time where muscles are pushed to a level of discomfort to increase flexibility so others may struggle with being nonjudgmental of the sensations they experience. Instead of labeling sensations as painful or even relaxing, remind individuals to keep their present moment focus on simply accepting these sensations in the body. The yoga script

provided above is one example of how to be mindful during yoga. Encourage athletes to seek out their own yoga routines to apply mindfulness to.

At Home Practices

Pass out copies of the mindfulness log for athletes to track their progress. This week, the goal is to practice PR (session 3) one time and the mindful yoga should be practiced 3 times before the next session. Additionally, have athletes incorporate mindful stretching into their daily stretching routine (e.g., at practice).

Elephant: “Mindfulness of posture” (Bays, 2011, p. 42) is an exercise that simply encourages athletes to pay attention to their posture. Throughout the day, athletes are to tune into their present posture and notice how it feels. This includes altering posture when slouching. This practice will help to increase awareness of the body at various points throughout the day. Notice posture when seated at meals, standing in line, or walking to a destination. Other aspects of posture to consider are head placement (e.g., tilt), differences between the left side and the right side of the body (e.g., in hips), or tension in the shoulders or neck (Radford, 2018). Elaborating on the mind-body connection, posture is often a reflection of how one is presently feeling. If the body is slumped, it might mean that the mind is feeling slumped or lethargic as well. Ask yourself: What reflection does your mood have on your posture? What about your posture on your mood?

Reminders: New reminders should be implemented as new tasks and exercises are assigned. To continue with the habit of pausing, keep reminders and alarms on the phone or computer for adding pauses into the day. If athletes start to get used to a reminder being there, make an effort to change it so it catches the eye once again. Reminders should be placed in different

environments too. As athletes begin to bring mindfulness into volleyball training, bring reminders as well.

Final Thoughts

The sessions have been building on each other and have now reached incorporating mindfulness with small movements. Practicing mindful stretching and mindful yoga can strengthen the mind-body connection. With continued and consistent practice, athletes are strengthening their mental muscle and mental ability to stay in the present moment and to accept it just as it is.

Most valuable lesson: Just like stretching muscles may be uncomfortable, so may stretching the mind. This discomfort is important for growth.

Session 5: Get Moving with the Warm Up

Stepping it up from the previous sessions, session 5 adds larger movements to training. Athletes will go through a walking meditation to increase awareness of a fully moving body. While in stretching, only one body part is moving at a time, walking involves more complete awareness because of multiple moving parts at once.

This session includes:

- Start with your breath
- Practice discussion
- Walking meditation
- At home practices
- Final thoughts

Start with Your Breath

Begin by starting with your breath (session 1). Allow athletes to settle into their seats or lay on the floor, wherever comfortable, and guide them to start by simply being with their breath for 1 minute. If needed, have a short discussion (2-3 minutes) on this experience. Consider how this exercise may change for athletes as their practice continues.

Practice Discussion

Invite athletes to have a discussion about their at home practice. It is recommended to spend 5-10 minutes on this discussion, but there may be reflections and observations that require more time. Suggestions for conversation include:

- What were your experiences with PR this week?
- How did you build mindful stretching into your routine?
- What have been your experiences with mindful yoga?

- Discuss your experiences with the elephant exercise (mindfulness of posture)
- How have you made time to do the at home practices?

Walking Meditation

Mindfulness was first introduced in this program as something to do while stationary (e.g., start with your breath). As the weeks go on, skills have been building on each other. Mindfulness practice now will expand beyond stillness and slight movements to walking. With the final goal being to become more mindful during sport, this session is an important stepping stone for continuing to develop mindfulness skills. This week's focus is going to be on a formal walking meditation.

A walking meditation is another way to practice being fully present in the moment. The practice will include letting thoughts come and go as they please, without judgment. Most people typically walk with an intention of arriving somewhere. While walking, one's thoughts are even already at the destination, thinking about what they are going to do when they get there (Radford, 2018). During a walking meditation, there is no destination. Therefore, there is no thinking about arriving. Athletes are encouraged to focus on the process of walking as opposed to where they are going to end up (Kaufman et al., 2018). This reinforces being in the present moment, with each and every step.

When preparing for a walking meditation, find a quiet space without the potential for disruption. Plan where the athletes will be walking before they begin, so it is not something that needs to be thought about during the meditation. One example is to designate two points on opposing sides of the room or gym, maybe 30 feet apart, and walk back and forth between the two points (Radford, 2018). Kaufman and colleagues (2018) suggest walking in a circle. Both

examples have no identifiable start or finish and that is key. Either way will suffice and either can be done by oneself or with others.

As previously mentioned, during the walking meditation, the focus is on the process of moving. Some things Radford (2018, p. 25) suggests taking note of include:

- When you take a step, which part of the foot contacts the ground first?
- Is your body weight over your feet as you walk or are you placing the feet further out in front of yourself?
- How are you holding your arms when you walk? Do they naturally swing?
- Do you notice areas of pain or tightness as you walk? (Remember to notice and accept, not judge!)
- Pick a part of the body (e.g., ankle, knee) and keep your attention there. What does it feel like in this area when walking?
- What is your breathing like? Is there a rhythm?

Remember, the breath is always present. So, remind athletes that during any type of meditation practice (formal or informal) they may return their attention to the breath to anchor themselves back into the present moment. The walking meditation may be uncomfortable or awkward for some people at first because it is slow and different from how we normally walk in our daily lives. Practice letting these thoughts go. Continue to bring attention back to the process of walking during the length of the practice.

Walking meditation script: The following script is one example of a walking meditation. This can be done alone or with a group of people. If it is more comfortable to walk in a circle, adjust the script as needed. Find a place to pause every so often to be still and patiently bring

awareness back to the body. Be sure to determine the focus and length for the meditation before beginning. Ten minutes is the recommended starting point but adjust as needed.

Ideally find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed. It can be indoors or outdoors and you might like to remove your shoes. Find two points on the ground around 10m (about 30 ft) apart and stand on one of the points. When you are ready, bring your attention to the sensations of your body in this standing position. Allow the body to be upright and dignified, with the eyes looking ahead. As best you can, let go of any tension in the body and allow the breath to move freely. Then guide your awareness down through the body into the soles of your feet and notice the sensations of contact with the ground. You may want to experiment with gently rocking forwards and backwards or side to side and, as you do so, really notice how the shifting of your weight impacts the sensations in your feet. Now, very slowly, peel one foot from the ground, raise and slowly place it in front of you. It can be helpful to take small steps with the toe pointed slightly outwards to maintain balance. Track the sensations you feel in the soles of your feet through this process. Now lift and place the other foot slowly enough that you can focus in detail on the sensations [in your feet and body].

Repeat this movement until you reach the second point. It can be helpful to come back to standing still for a [few breaths] before [slowly] turning and walking back. During this practice the mind will undoubtedly wander off into all kinds of places and this is not wrong. In fact, it is an essential part of the practice, as it allows us to practise [sic] noticing these movements of the mind, and purposefully to return the awareness to the moment-by-moment sensations in the soles of your feet. Each time you notice the

mind is no longer present, simply come to stillness and, with an attitude of patience and acceptance, return the awareness and begin again (Radford, 2018, pp. 44-45).

Walking meditation discussion: Following the walking meditation, have a discussion about thoughts and experiences with this type of practice. One suggestion if working with a group is to let the athletes discuss in pairs or small groups first. Then, come together as one for further discussion. This gives each person the chance to share something about their experience. Some suggestions for discussion include:

- What was your experience like during the walking meditation?
- How did you maintain focus and awareness when your thoughts drifted?
- What did you notice about walking this way?
- How was it to move forward while still trying to focus on the present moment?

(Kaufman et al., 2018, p. 118)

- How might this meditation be applied to volleyball?

At Home Practices

The at home practice this week will include doing the walking meditation a total of 4 times. Complete a body scan (session 3) at the beginning and the end of the walking meditation each time you practice. Leaders, remember to hand out copies of the mindfulness log for athletes to track their experiences. Remind athletes to continue practicing mindful stretching however it has made its way into their daily training routine.

Elephant: Extending from the walking meditation, “bottoms of the feet” (Bays, 2011, p.99) is a practice that can advance awareness of the body. This elephant exercise is dedicated to being aware of what the soles of the feet feel like when planted on the ground. Notice the pressure in shoes or against the ground. Athletes should pay attention to the temperature of their feet. For

example, are your feet feeling hot or cold? When do you notice these sensations? Not only can this increase body awareness, but by thinking about feet, we are becoming rooted in the present moment, right where our feet are. Several times throughout the day, take note of the bottoms of your feet.

Reminders: New reminders should be implemented as new tasks and exercises are assigned. To continue with the habit of pausing, keep reminders and alarms on the phone or computer for adding pauses into the day. If athletes start to get used to a reminder being there, make an effort to change it so it catches the eye once again. A group discussion about reminders can allow individuals to learn ideas from each other about what works for them.

Final Thoughts

Although it can be uncomfortable at first, the walking meditation is the bridge between being mindful while still and being mindful while in motion. Slowing down the mind and body for a walking meditation is challenging because it is an experience that typically does not get much attention. Not only does this exercise help to bring awareness to the present moment, but it forces athletes to think about and appreciate their body. Athletes may begin to notice the strong muscles in their legs, the joints that move fluidly, and the many different parts of taking a single step that all happen in a moment's time. Take the time to appreciate these working parts of the physical body. Athletes may notice that they begin to develop a sense of compassion and appreciation toward how hard their body works. This not only includes an appreciation for moving from place to place, but also includes appreciating being able to play the sport they love.

Most valuable lesson: Be where your feet are, in this present moment, both physically and mentally. It is really hard to be anywhere else!

Session 6: See the Court

One aspect of mental training is re-creating the experience of performing in the mind, also known as imagery. While sight is the sense often linked with imagery, for best results, imagery should include all other senses too (i.e., taste, smell, sound, and touch/feeling). Many successful athletes practice imagery in a number of ways to master their sport and prepare for competition (Eiring & Hathaway, 2012). This session will first introduce and then define imagery. Imagery will then be explored as a tool to supplement mindfulness during a formal meditation.

This session includes:

- Start with your breath
- Practice discussion
- Power of imagery
- Lake meditation
- At home practices
- Final thoughts

Start with Your Breath

Begin by starting with your breath (session 1). Allow athletes to settle into their seats or lay on the floor, wherever comfortable, and guide them to start by simply being with their breath for 1 minute. If needed, have a short discussion (2-3 minutes) on this experience. Consider how this exercise may change for athletes as their practice continues.

Practice Discussion

Invite athletes to have a discussion about their at home practice. It is recommended to spend 5-10 minutes on this discussion, but there may be reflections and observations that require more time. Suggestions for conversation include:

- What differences do you notice in your body during the body scan before and after the walking mediation?
- How have your experiences changed after a week of practicing the walking mediation?
- Discuss your experiences with the elephant exercise (bottoms of the feet).

Power of Imagery

Imagery can be described as creating an experience with the mind (Vealey & Forlenza, 2015). Often, athletes focus on seeing the experience by creating a picture. However, other key aspects of imagery involve the other senses along with sight. To create a strong image, one must add in sounds, smells, touch, and even taste if possible. To make the image even more powerful image, athletes are encouraged to add the feeling of their body moving to the image. This is called the kinesthetic sense (Vealey & Forlenza, 2015).

If a volleyball player is using imagery to practice a serve, the kinesthetic sense would include having the athlete re-create the feeling of their hand holding the ball and then tossing it in the air. They would attempt to feel their striking arm swinging to and through the ball for the serve. Along with the kinesthetic sense, this athlete would attempt to capture the sounds (e.g., noisy crowd) sights (e.g., seeing the flight of the ball), smells (e.g., scent of the gym) and feelings (e.g., ball to hand contact), associated with serving. The more real the total image, the better. This kind of imagery activates similar parts of the brain as when one is actively engaging in the experience (Vealey & Forlenza, 2015). This allows learning to still take place, even

without physical practice. It is important to make the image as realistic as possible for best results (Vealey & Forlenza, 2015). Imagery is used in sport for a wide variety of reasons. In volleyball, one might use imagery to help with:

- practicing a skill (e.g., setting a particular tempo)
- learning a new play (e.g., free-ball)
- managing emotions (e.g., relaxing)
- correcting mistakes (e.g., keeping arm high after swinging into the net)
- practicing a routine (e.g., pre-serve routine)
- healing an injury

Imagery practice: Now that athletes have had an introduction to imagery and what it includes, the next exercise will put the concept of imagery into practice. Invite athletes to pick a simple skill or situation in volleyball. Use the list above for ideas if needed. The following script is written for pre-game relaxation. Depending on what athletes choose for their imagery practice, leaders may adapt the script themselves or even invite athletes to write their own. Writing an imagery script is one way to further understand all of the details that go into a strong, complete image.

Take a full, deep breath and close your eyes. Keep your body in an alert position, preferable sitting up straight with your feet flat on the ground. Take a few moments to tune your attention in toward your breath. Notice the rise and fall of your chest. Notice the pace of your breathing. Notice the sounds your body is making. *Pause for 5 seconds.*

Slowly bring your attention away from your breath and begin to visually build the environment around you. You are in your home gym during the playing of the National Anthem before a match. Create this image. What do you see? Are the lights dim or

bright? What colors are on the walls and bleachers? Where are you standing in the gym? What are you wearing? Is anyone else with you? *Pause for 10 seconds.*

Once you have a visual, begin to add other senses to the image. The National Anthem is playing. What does that sound like? How silent is the gym? *Pause for 5 seconds.* Notice any smells in the gym. Can you smell your uniform? Your deodorant? Is popcorn being made at concessions? *Pause for 5 seconds.* What taste is left in your mouth? Did you just have a swig of water or Gatorade? Are you chewing gum? *Pause for 5 seconds.* Touch. What is your body in contact with? Can you feel your feet pressed against the floor? Where are your hands? Do you notice your jersey against your skin? *Pause for 5 seconds.*

Lastly, think about how your body is feeling and bring this into the picture. If you are moving side to side or swinging your arms, attempt to feel this motion while sitting still. It is pre-game, so are you feeling excited? Do you have butterflies? Nerves? Is your heart racing? Imagine how you might feel in this moment and do your best to capture it all in this image. *Pause for 10 seconds.*

Wrap up your image as the National Anthem finishes playing. Slowly begin to bring yourself back to the present moment and open your eyes.

Imagery discussion: Invite athletes to have a brief discussion about their experience with imagery. Some things to discuss include:

- What senses were easy for you to create? Which ones were difficult?
- Was your viewpoint from inside your own body looking out or were you watching yourself as if you were in a movie?
- What are your thoughts, feelings, and reactions to this experience?

Just like any skill, the more that athletes practice imagery by seeing and feeling the desired action or experience, the easier it will be to do. Additionally, imagery use increases the likelihood that athletes will perform or behave in the desired way when the practiced situation arises (Vealey & Forlenza, 2015). As discussed with the mind-body connection, using imagery can evoke certain feelings within the body. In the example above, if an athlete typically gets very anxious and stressed before a match, imagery practice would be one way to learn how to slow the heart rate and invite calm feelings to the pre-game image. Along with using imagery to practice skills in sport, athletes can bring imagery into meditation as another way to cultivate feelings of acceptance and compassion.

Lake Meditation

There are many different guided meditations that invite the user to create various images with their minds. The lake meditation provided in this chapter uses symbolism to represent feeling calm, even in the midst of other emotions. The practice of involving the image adds to the feelings experienced in the body. For those who struggle with formal meditations, guided meditations that include images may be a good way to keep the mind focused throughout meditation. The following lake meditation is approximately 20 minutes.

Lake meditation script:

“This meditation is done in a lying or reclining position, and begins by paying attention to the actual sensations of contact and support as you lie here, noticing where your body is making contact, how your weight is distributed on the floor, bed or recliner... actually sensing into your body, feeling your feet... your legs... hips... lower and upper body... arms... your shoulders and your head...

And when you are ready, bringing awareness to breath, the actual physical sensations, feeling each breath as it comes in and goes out... letting the breath be just as it is, without trying to change or regulate it in any way... allowing it to flow easily and naturally, with its own rhythm and pace, knowing you are breathing perfectly well right now, nothing for you to do, allowing a sense of being complete, whole, in this very moment, just letting your breath be your breath...

As you rest here, letting an image form in your mind's eye of a lake, a body of water, large or small, held in a receptive basin by the earth itself, noting in the mind's eye and your own heart, that water likes to pool in low places, it seeks its own level, asks to be held, contained.

Letting this image gradually come into greater focus. Even if it doesn't come as a visual image, allowing the sense of this lake and feeling its presence...

The lake you're invoking may be deep or shallow, blue or green, muddy or clear. With no wind, the surface will be flat, mirror-like, reflecting trees rocks, sky and clouds, holding everything in itself momentarily...

Wind may come and stir up waves, causing the reflections to distort and disappear, but then sunlight may sparkle in the ripples and dance on the waves in a play of shimmering diamonds...

When night comes, it's the moon's turn to dance on the lake, or when the surface is still, to be reflected in it along with the outline of trees and shadows. In winter, the lake may freeze over, yet be teeming with movement and life below...

As you rest here breathing, as you establish this image of a lake in your mind's eye, allowing yourself, when you feel ready, to bring it inside yourself completely, so that

your being merges with the lake, becomes one with it, so that all your energies in this moment are held in awareness with openness and compassion for yourself, in the same way as the lake's waters are held by the receptive and accepting basin of the earth herself. Breathing as the lake, feeling its body as your body, allowing your mind and your heart to be open and receptive, moment by moment, to reflect whatever comes near, or to be clear all the way to the bottom. Experiencing moments of complete stillness, when both reflection and water are completely clear... and other moments perhaps when the surface is disturbed, choppy, stirred up, reflections and depth lost for the moment.

And through it all as you lie here, simply observing the play of the various energies of your own mind and heart, the fleeting thoughts and feelings, impulses and reactions, which come and go as ripples and waves, noting their effects. In contact with them, just as you are in contact with and feel the various changing energies that play on the lake, the wind, the waves, the light, the shadows and the reflections, the colors and smells.

Noticing the effect of your thoughts and feelings. Do they disturb the surface and clarity of the mind's lake? Do they muddy the waters? Is that okay with you? Isn't having a rippling or a wavy surface a part of being a lake? Might it be possible to identify not only with the surface of your lake, but with the entire body of water, so that you become the stillness below the surface as well, which at most experiences only gentle undulations, even when the surface is choppy and ragged.

And in the same way, in your meditation practice and in your daily life, can you be in touch, not only with the changing content and intensity of your thoughts and

feelings, but also with the vast unwavering reservoir of awareness itself, residing below the surface of your mind. The lake can teach this, remind us of the lake within ourselves. If you find this image to be of value, you may want to use it from time to time to deepen and enrich your meditation practice. You might also invite this lake image to empower you and guide your actions in the world as you move through the unfolding of each day, carrying this vast reservoir of mindfulness within your heart...

Dwelling here in the stillness of this moment, until signaled by the sound of the bells, we can be the lake in silence now, affirming our ability to hold in awareness and in acceptance, right now, all our qualities of mind and body, just as the lake sits held, cradled, contained by the earth, reflecting sun, moon, stars, trees, clouds and sky, birds and light, caressed by the air and the wind, which bring out and highlight its sparkle, its vitality, its potential, moment by moment.

So, in the time that remains before the bells which will mark the end of the meditation, continuing to sustain the lake meditation on your own, in silence, moment by moment, being the lake with its own storms and moments of peace..." (from Potter, n.d.)

Lake meditation discussion: Have athletes discuss their experiences with the lake meditation. Different individuals may have created different images in their heads even though everyone was guided in the same way. Remind athletes to accept, without any judgment how their teammates may have interpreted the meditation. An interesting way to talk about the meditation is to provide paper and pencils for coloring. Athletes can draw what the lake meditation represents to them (e.g., visually, figuratively) and discuss during the process. Some points for discussion include:

- What thoughts or feelings did you experience during the lake meditation?

- What does the lake represent for you?
- How might you apply this exercise to volleyball?

At Home Practices

For practice this week, complete the lake meditation 3 times. Athletes may notice that each time they do the guided meditation, a different scene, new interpretation or unique realization comes about from the meditation. Encourage athletes to take note of these experiences on their mindfulness log so it can be discussed at the next session.

Elephant: This week, pay attention to feelings of *impatience* (Bays, 2011, p. 182). Notice impatience as it exists during the day. As a society, we are often rushing to get from one place to the next, just so we can rush through that place to be at another. This exercise challenges athletes to slow down, be present, and ask, “*why* am I feeling rushed?”. Along with noticing impatience, have athletes notice how their bodies feel when they are feeling impatient. Do your legs tap? Do you become angry or irritated? Being in a hurry to get somewhere else takes away from being able to enjoy exactly what is happening at this moment. Think about the lake meditation as a way to re-group in the present moment. Even though things may be happening all around, focus energy on being still and mindful, and let the ripples subside whenever they subside.

Reminders: New reminders should be implemented as new tasks and exercises are assigned. To continue with the habit of pausing, keep reminders and alarms on the phone or computer for adding pauses into the day. If athletes start to get used to a reminder being there, make an effort to change it so it catches the eye once again.

Final Thoughts

Imagery is a valuable skill that can be used in many ways. For sport performance, it often is used as a way to prepare and practice. Rehearsing strategies and skills in the mind can help

athletes think that they have already experienced the situation before. Beyond sport performance, imagery can be used complement different meditations. Through strong images, the symbolism in the lake meditation can make athletes feel more like the lake; deep and calm. Be creative when using imagery, the possibilities are endless!

Most valuable lesson: See with the mind what you want to do and how you want to feel.

Session 7: Stepping onto the Court

Alas, athletes will begin to implement lessons from all of the previous sessions to the volleyball court via basic, fundamental drills. Included in Session 7 will be an exercise to expand mindfulness to all aspects of daily life where athletes are challenged to see just how long they can be fully present in the moment. Following, the session will advance by challenging athletes to be mindful while playing volleyball. Athletes will progress through a few simple volleyball drills as a way to practice bringing mindfulness onto the volleyball court.

This session includes:

- Start with your breath
- Practice discussion
- Just mindfulness
- Mindful volleyball skills progression (phase 1)
- At home practices
- Final thoughts

Start with Your Breath

Begin by starting with your breath (session 1). Allow athletes to settle into their seats or lay on the floor, wherever comfortable, and guide them to start by simply being with their breath for 1 minute. If needed, have a short discussion (2-3 minutes) on this experience. Consider how this exercise may change for athletes as their practice continues.

Practice Discussion

Invite athletes to have a discussion about their at home practice. It is recommended to spend 5-10 minutes on this discussion, but there may be reflections and observations that require more time. Suggestions for conversation include:

- How has the lake meditation developed since your first practice?
- What did you notice about impatience in your life?
- What exercises are you still using in your daily life from previous sessions?

Just Mindfulness

Through the last several weeks athletes have been working hard to develop mindfulness skills and apply them to various parts of their life. The formal meditations practiced each week are one way to practice maintaining intentional awareness and acceptance in a controlled setting. On the other hand, the elephant exercises are informal ways to develop mindfulness skills within activities of daily living. In other words, informal practices do not include periods of sitting meditation; rather, they encourage users to apply the concepts of mindfulness to everyday activities. By practicing these types of exercises, mindfulness becomes a part of an athlete's everyday living as opposed to a skill that requires stillness and silence to tap into. Because volleyball is rarely still and quiet, these informal activities are crucial for developing mindfulness skills with the intention of eventually merging them with volleyball.

The practice this week is going to challenge athletes to see how mindful they can be in any given moment of life doing regular, daily activities. To practice "just mindfulness," one tunes into their breath or any other anchor that roots them into the present moment. This will most likely change depending on what activity the athlete is doing. From here, commit to doing the activity as mindfully as possible for as long as possible. There will come a time when the athlete realizes they have not been being mindful for maybe the last 10 minutes or so. That is okay and expected. At that moment, encourage the athlete to reign their thoughts back in and start over again. This time, trying to stay present and mindful longer than they were able to

previously. The goal is to see how long one can be mindful while going through their daily activities. To practice, athletes will begin with the first of two sessions of mindful volleyball.

Mindful Volleyball Skills Progression

The mindful volleyball skills progression activity is going to join mindfulness with volleyball skills. This particular outline will be for the skill of forearm passing, but it can be done using any skill in volleyball. Forearm passing will be broken down to simple movements where athletes will practice these skills while being mindful. The volleyball skills will slowly build, adding some difficulty for the athlete. Feel free to adapt the skills based on level of experience or personal interest or need. It is encouraged that leaders develop their own progression for other volleyball skills as well, such as serving, attacking, and setting.

To start, have the athlete select a cue, or a reminder to stay present. This could be many things. In the past sessions, the breath has often been used as a cue for awareness and anchoring to the present moment. Athletes could choose one of the elephant exercises that have been practiced, such as feeling the *bottoms of your feet*. Other cues or anchors that are volleyball specific include the feeling of the ball during ball contact, the sound of a whistle, or every time the athlete returns to base position on the volleyball court. These cues should be meaningful to the athlete and help ground them in the present moment. For the purpose of this exercise, ball contact will be used as the chosen anchor for remaining present.

Passing progression: The following drills will start with the basics of passing and then develop to more complex passing drills. These require athletes to pair with at least one other person (i.e., to toss volleyballs). Advance at a rate that is comfortable yet challenging for the athlete. Leaders may find that some athletes need more time than others with certain aspects of MV and this is okay. Adjust the activity as seen fit. Do can do each drill for a pre-set length of time. Drills in

volleyball are often done with a certain goal in sight (e.g., 10 good passes). For the purpose of MV, it is encouraged that leaders stray away from judging volleyball skills as good or bad. Instead, the leader and the athletes should keep the focus of MV on being present, aware, and nonjudgmental. It is helpful if the athlete's partner and the leader are both knowledgeable of the athlete's cue so they can serve as an additional reminder to stay present throughout the MV activities.

One knee passing: The player is kneeling with one knee on the ground (e.g., right knee) and the other foot flat on the ground (e.g., left foot) with that (i.e., left) leg bent at a 90-degree angle at the knee. A ball is tossed slightly out in front of the player so that she has to hinge forward at the hips and pass with her platform back to the target (i.e., person tossing). There should be minimal arm movement. That is, the passing arms should not break the plane of her shoulders. This drill eliminates the lower half of the body from the pass so that the player can simply focus on her passing platform. Using ball contact as the anchor, the athlete should pay attention to how the ball feels as it strikes her platform with each pass. Encourage athletes to notice any thoughts, feelings, and sensations that arise during this drill. The first athlete can do this drill for 1-2 minutes and then switch with their partner (e.g., 1st athlete tosses and 2nd athlete is passing).

Stationary passing: The player is now standing in her ready position as the ball gets tossed to her platform. The athlete's feet are shoulder-width apart with her right foot slightly in front of her left. Her legs have a soft bend in her knees and her hips are hinged slightly forward. She is standing with her weight forward, on her toes and her arms are out in front of her. Her feet are now involved in this drill, although the tosses should still

be to the player. She will still have to step “left, right” into the pass and now is able to use her legs and her arms to get the pass back to her target.

_____ Using ball contact as the anchor, the athlete should pay attention to how the ball feels as it strikes her platform with each pass. Encourage athletes to notice any thoughts, feelings, and sensations that arise during this drill. The first athlete can do this drill for 1-2 minutes and then switch with their partner (e.g., 1st athlete tosses and 2nd athlete is passing).

Two shuffles: Now, movement is added to the passes. The person tossing will toss the ball two shuffles to the right of the athlete in the drill. The player must now be mindful of her movements to the ball and through the pass back to the target. She then mindfully resets to the starting position. This drill can be practiced having the player shuffle two paces to the left, two to the right, two forward, and two backward, all passing the ball to the designated target.

Using ball contact as the anchor, the athlete should pay attention to how the ball feels as it strikes her platform with each pass. Encourage athletes to notice any thoughts, feelings, and sensations that arise during this drill. The first athlete can do this drill for 1-2 minutes and then switch with their partner (e.g., 1st athlete tosses and 2nd athlete is passing).

Moving forward: From here, there are many different ways leaders can go with MV skills progression. Having the player pass multiple balls in one turn can test her mindfulness for a longer period of time. “Hit, tip, chase” requires the passer to dig an attack, run through a tip, and chase a long ball consecutively before returning to the back of the line. “Which way” requires the passer to be aware of the person tossing or attacking the volleyball.

This person will hold their arms out to either side with a volleyball resting in each palm. When this person flicks a ball out of their hand, the passer must react to that direction and pass the ball. This can be modified for digging by having an attacker strike down-balls to the athlete. The attacker will have to show with their shoulders which direction the attack is going and the passer will have to read quickly and correctly to get to the ball. Both of these drills require the passer to be present and focused on the attack in order to react quick enough to get the pass off. Continue to advance and adapt drills to more game-like situations as athletes strengthens their mindfulness skills on the volleyball court.

Passing progression discussion: Discuss with athletes their experiences of playing volleyball mindfully. Be ready for a wide array of responses and reactions in this session. Keep in mind that thoughts of *trying* to be mindful or frustrations as a result of the mind wandering are not ways to practice accepting. The paradox with trying to be mindful often results in too much effort and judgment on the experience, taking away from any possibility to be mindful. Frustrations with a wandering mind can be re-framed. Each time the mind wanders and is successfully brought back to the point of attention, athletes are training their brain to be stronger.

Another common theme between athletes might be their continued judgment on the quality of their passes during the MV skills progression. Although it is a different type of practice, remind athletes that the placement of the pass is not what is important while engaging in MV. Rather, it is training the brain to be mindful despite many things competing for attention. With continued practice, athletes will improve their ability to be mindful and volleyball performance may benefit as a result of that. Some things to consider during discussion include:

- How was mindful volleyball different for you?

- What thoughts, feelings, or sensations did you notice during the passing progression?
- What cue or anchor did you choose? Did it work?
- What was easy about practicing MV? What was difficult?

Throughout the conversation, remind athletes that mindfulness includes not striving to be something different or do something particular. It includes accepting what is happening and being okay with that and being compassionate toward the self in each moment. Mindfulness includes awareness of how the body is feeling and what the mind is thinking, but it does not judge these thoughts and feelings as bad, good, or unwanted. Rather, a mindful athlete accepts the thoughts and moves forward.

At Home Practices

Formal meditation this week will be left to the choice of the athlete. Before the session is over, the athlete must write their practice intention on their mindfulness log and share it with another teammate. The player is to select one formal meditation from previous sessions and practice it 3 times throughout the week. The options are:

- deep breath meditation (session 1)
- progressive relaxation (session 3)
- mindful yoga (session 4)
- walking meditation (session 5)
- lake meditation (session 6)

Additionally, the athlete should spend at least the first 5-10 minutes of each volleyball practice or training session doing the MV passing drills practiced in today's session.

Elephant: This week, the practice will include *just being mindful*. Throughout the week, select an activity to do mindfully and engage fully in that activity. Set a timer! Athletes should see how long they can stay present with the activity before their mind wanders off to another place. It is common to not even realize the mind has wandered, even for some time. When an athlete notices it, acknowledge it and bring it back to the activity of focus. It is okay if *just being mindful* only lasts for a short amount of time. Take note of the length of time at the beginning of the week and keep trying and practicing improving on staying mindful.

Reminders: New reminders should be implemented as new tasks and exercises are assigned. To continue with the habit of pausing, keep reminders and alarms on the phone or computer for adding pauses into the day. If athletes start to get used to a reminder being there, make an effort to change it so it catches the eye once again.

Final Thoughts

Being mindful is more than just meditating. It is more than listening to someone instructing one to focus on their breath. It is a way of living. The roots of mindfulness stem from Eastern cultures where mindfulness is not just a practice, but rather a way of life (Keng, Smoski, & Robins, 2011). By practicing *just being mindful*, athletes are working to bring mindfulness into all areas of their life, not just formal meditation and not just volleyball.

Most valuable lesson: Simply *be* in every aspect of life. Be present for as much as you possibly can, as long as you can.

Session 8: Teamwork

Mindfulness and its connection with awareness, acceptance, and presence has been discussed and practiced in several ways throughout this program. Another component of mindfulness is its influence on compassion and interpersonal relationships. Because volleyball is a team sport, it is important to address this aspect of being mindful. In this session, activities will be completed that focus on appreciation and acceptance of others. Additionally, the team will partake in a formal group meditation with the intention of loving kindness to expand on mindfulness in this context.

For those completing the MV program alone, the lessons in this session are still valuable to building mindfulness skills and cultivating a sense of kindness and compassion. While some of the activities may need to be adjusted for solo use, do not skip over this session as a whole. Creating a sense of compassion for the self and for others (even when they are not present) is a moving experience with many personal and interpersonal benefits on and off the volleyball court.

This session includes:

- Start with your breath
- Practice discussion
- Other aspects of mindfulness (i.e., compassion, kindness, openness)
- Brainspin™ activity
- Formal group meditation – loving kindness
- At home practices
- Final thoughts

Start with Your Breath

Begin by starting with your breath (session 1). Allow athletes to settle into their seats or lay on the floor, wherever comfortable, and guide them to start by simply being with their breath for one minute. If needed, have a short discussion (2-3 minutes) on this experience. Consider how this exercise may change for athletes as their practice continues to develop and advance.

Practice Discussion

Invite athletes to have a discussion about their at home practice. It is recommended to spend 5-10 minutes on this discussion, but there may be reflections and observations that require more time. Suggestions for conversation include:

- What thoughts, feelings, or sensations have you noticed when practicing mindful volleyball?
- Have these thoughts, feelings, or sensations changed throughout the last week?
- What were your experiences like practicing *just* being mindful?

Other Aspects of Mindfulness

One of the three main components of mindfulness is acceptance. Accepting present experiences in a non-judging way can help cultivate feelings of compassion both for the self and for others. In sport it may be easy to quickly judge people and performances as being good or bad. For example: *That play was bad. Our opponent is good.* Although the judgment may be based on other objective measures, the subjective experience is what is relevant to each individual. Placing judgment on a situation or experience creates a fixed perception that may lead to unnecessary self-criticism. This perception is then carried along to subsequent experiences, tampering one's ability to be present. The experience is suddenly attached to the individual, or they are attached to it.

On the contrary, simply acknowledging what happened instead of labeling it as good or bad can change one's perception of the experience, allowing for non-attachment. At the end of the day, the play may not have been bad; the athlete could have simply made a mistake (it happens). The opponent may not be *that* good, they may have played a different schedule or played under different circumstances. Judging an experience, creates a label and allows individuals to hold onto it. Through practicing mindfulness, athletes can learn to accept the experience for what it is (Brown, 2015), separate it from their sense of self (van Vugt, 2015), and move on to what is important next. Not only can this change their subjective view of the experience, but it allows athletes to be a little more kind to themselves in the process (Brown, 2015). Further, by not being attached to particular types of thinking, athletes are practicing being open to other options. Suddenly they become more aware of the other responses that they can have and can choose one that suits their particular needs (Brown, 2015).

Another intriguing component of mindfulness practice is the ability to build self-compassion and connections with other people. Mindfulness practice has been shown to increase positive relationships with others through a sense of trust and closeness (Brown, 2015). Empathy toward others becomes greater, dealing with conflict gets easier, and overall satisfaction with interpersonal relationships may increase as a result of mindfulness practice (Brown, 2015; Kaufman et al., 2018). Having positive relationships is important for team productivity and success.

Brainspin™ Activity

To harness being accepting of others' ideas, athletes will play a version of the game, Brainspin™. During this activity, athletes will be challenged to think creatively about a variety of both abstract and basic shapes that can be found on each Brainspin™ card. Through the different

phases of the activity, athletes will share their ideas with others and attempt to understand the creative ideas of their teammates. At times it may be challenging to see things from another person's perspective and that is completely okay. The goal is not to judge teammates, but to accept them and their perspective for what they are. By accepting and not judging another's experience, team members will learn about how one another view world. This is just one version of how the Brainspin™ cards can be used. Leaders are encouraged to come up with different activities that work for their group of players. Leaders may even create their own images or invite athletes to create cards too. Adjust the length of each session as needed.

Set-up: The cards can be found in Appendix C and will need to be cut out individually for the activity. Each person needs something to write with and something to write on. The group leader should have a stopwatch. Break into groups of two or three and place one Brainspin™ card face down in the middle of each group.

Game play: Flip the card over when the timer starts. For the first phase of the activity, athletes must think of and write down all of the things that the Brainspin™ card looks like. Be creative! Anything goes in this game. Have athletes strive for the longest list and most creative answers. The leader can come around to the groups and rotate the Brainspin™ card 45-degrees so that athletes now have an altered viewpoint of the image. After about 90 seconds, the leader will call for time. Have athletes share each of their lists within their small groups. Remind athletes that it is important not to judge what someone else came up with. Instead, have athletes try to expand their thinking and see it for themselves. After sharing within the small groups, each small group will share with the larger group. Have each small group select their favorite three ideas from their combined lists to share with the rest of the group. This allows groups to see other images and hear other ideas.

For phase two, pass out a new card (face down) to each group. Flip the card over when the timer starts. This time, athletes will have 90 seconds to work together and come up with a list of things that the card looks like. Only write down answers that everyone in the group can agree on. Encourage the longest list and most creative answers. The leader can come around the groups and rotate the Brainspin™ card 45-degrees so that athletes now have an altered viewpoint of the image. After about 90 seconds, the leader will call for time. Have each group select their favorite two ideas to share with the rest of the groups.

In phase three, decide to switch up the small groups to work with new people or leave them the same. This time, each group should have three cards, all face down. When the clock begins, athletes will have two minutes to come up with as many ideas as they can putting all three images together. Encourage the longest list and most creative answers. When time is called, have each group select their favorite two ideas to share with the rest of the groups.

Brainspin™ activity discussion: Following the activity, begin a discussion with the group about their thoughts, reactions, and feelings during the activity. Remind the group of the intention and focus of the session, which includes being accepting, open, and non-judging of experiences (i.e., of the self and others). Some topics for discussion include:

- What was it like to try to see things from someone else's perspective?
- How did it feel if someone negatively reacted to your idea? How did it feel if they reacted positively?
- What did you do to make sure that you included the entire group when making your lists?
- When did you notice your own judgment?
- What was most challenging about this activity?

- How can you apply this activity to volleyball?

Formal Group Meditation

Following the discussion of the Brainspin™ activity, the group will participate in a formal group meditation that has an emphasis on kindness and compassion. While it is likely that the group has meditated together prior to this experience, the intention with this meditation is specifically on the compassion and kindness component, which creates a different experience. For athletes completing MV alone, this meditation can still be done without a group. Compassion can be still be fostered, but in a different way. Do not skip this meditation; many benefits can still be gained.

Begin with the “start with your breath” exercise (session 1) to get athletes comfortable and centered. Once complete, move on to the following script for a loving kindness meditation (adapted from Kabat-Zinn, 1994, pp. 164-168):

Center yourself in your posture and in your breathing. Then, from your heart or from your belly, invite feelings or images of kindness and love to radiate until they fill your whole being. Allow yourself to be cradled by your own awareness as if you were as deserving of loving kindness as any child. Let yourself bask in this energy of loving kindness, breathing it in and breathing it out; letting it nourish your body.

Invite feelings of peacefulness and acceptance to be present in you. You may say to yourself any of the following sayings, again and again: May I be free from hatred. May I not suffer. May I be happy. These words are just meant to evoke feelings of loving kindness. They are wishing oneself well – consciously formed intentions to be free now, in this moment at least, from the problems we so often make for ourselves.

Once you have established yourself as a center of love and kindness radiating throughout your being, feeling totally accepted, stay here for a moment. Soaking it up, drinking it in. Renewing yourself, nourishing yourself. This can be a profoundly healing practice for body and soul.

Having established a radiant center in your being, let loving kindness radiate outwardly and direct it wherever you like. You might first direct it toward the members of your immediate family. Visualize them, wishing them well, that they not suffer, that they come to know their true way in the world, that they may experience love and acceptance in life. As you go along, include any others you wish; your friends, a partner, teammates... Wish them well, honor them. If it is liberating, find a place in your own heart to forgive them for their limitations, for their fears, and for any wrong actions and suffering they may have caused.

And there's no need to stop here. You can direct loving kindness toward anybody, toward people you know and people you don't. It may benefit them, but it will certainly benefit you by refining and extending your emotional being. This extension matures as you purposefully direct loving kindness toward people you have had a hard time with, toward those you dislike or are repulsed by, toward those who threaten you or have hurt you. You can also practice directing loving kindness toward whole groups of people – toward all those who are oppressed, or who suffer, or whose lives are caught up in war or violence or hatred, understanding that they are not different from you – that they too have loved ones, hopes and aspirations, and needs for shelter, food, and peace. And you can extend loving kindness to the planet itself, its glories and its silent suffering, to the

environment, the streams and rivers, to the air, the oceans, the forests, to plants and animals, collectively or singly.

There is no limit to the practice of loving kindness in meditation or in one's life. You are uncovering what is always present; Love and kindness are here all the time, somewhere, in fact, everywhere. We are stretching and expanding our mind, like our muscles, and although it can be painful, we expand, we grow, we change ourselves, and we change the world.

Formal group meditation discussion: Allow a few moments for the group to process the meditation. While the group is likely to have meditated together before, there was an emphasis in this session on the ability to do the meditation together as a group. This may have changed intentions and perceptions of the experience for some. This meditation also was the first to really expand outside of the individual body and include other beings. Be sure to have a group discussion on this overall experience. Some topics to discuss include:

- What kinds of thoughts or emotions did this meditation bring about?
- What was it like giving away loving kindness to others?
- What judgments did you notice?
- How can this be applied to volleyball?

At Home Practices

For this week's formal meditation, complete the loving kindness meditation 3 times. These three times do not have to be with a group but can be done individually. Aligned with previous sessions, continue the mindful stretching routine that has been established and continue with 5-10 minutes of mindful volleyball at the beginning of each practice session. Be sure to record and track progress.

Elephant: For this week, the practice is titled, “Appreciation” (Bays, 2011, p. 162). This practice extends feelings of kindness and compassion to everyday life. Throughout the day, stop and pause. Then, ask: What can I appreciate in this moment? Answers could include what your body is feeling or doing, something about yourself or someone else, appreciation toward the environment, anything. Pausing during the day allows continued practice of being present. Appreciating something in that moment allows kindness and acceptance of current experiences.

Reminders: New reminders should be implemented as new tasks and exercises are assigned. To continue with the habit of pausing, keep reminders and alarms on the phone or computer for adding pauses into the day. If athletes start to get used to a reminder being there, make an effort to change it so it catches the eye once again. Because this week’s elephant exercise is similar to the pausing and taking three deep breaths, athletes could refer back to what worked for them during that practice and apply it now.

Final Thoughts

Practicing kindness and acceptance are key features of being mindful. By not judging experiences, athletes are able to create some distance between themselves and those experiences. As a result, they can learn to be more accepting of themselves, the situations they get into, and of other people around. This continued mindful practice can help with increasing positive aspects of relationships and foster a sense of self-compassion along the way.

Most valuable lesson: A little loving kindness can go a long way, for ourselves and for others.

Session 9: Increasing the Tempo

As mindfulness skills continue to develop, the way they are brought onto the volleyball court also advances. It is during this session where athletes will be challenged to extend their mindfulness to all aspects of the volleyball game. During this session, athletes will build on the previous lesson of “just mindfulness” and “MV skills progression” by increasing the pace and complexity of various volleyball drills. This can be a big challenge for many, so it is important to remember that just like all other skills, both physical and mental, these mindfulness practices will continue to take time, persistence, and patience. This learning can be related to learning offense in volleyball. Volleyball players start with slow, high sets as beginners. As their skills develop and become more advanced, the offense increases in tempo by introducing lower, faster, sets. Athletes will also discuss having a volleyball specific cue and how they can use it to help bring them back to the present moment when the mind has drifted away.

This session includes:

- Start with your breath
- Practice discussion
- Just mindfulness
- Mindful volleyball skills progression (phase 2)
- At home practices
- Final thoughts

Start with Your Breath

Begin by starting with your breath (session 1). Allow athletes to settle into their seats or lay on the floor, wherever comfortable, and guide them to start by simply being with their breath

for one minute. If needed, have a short discussion (2-3 minutes) on this experience. Consider how this exercise may change for athletes as their practice continues.

Practice Discussion

Invite athletes to have a discussion about their at home practice. It is recommended to spend 5-10 minutes on this discussion, but there may be reflections and observations that require more time. Suggestions for conversation include:

- What were your experiences like doing the loving kindness meditation throughout the week?
- What did you notice about your responses to the appreciation exercise?
- How have your thoughts, feelings, and emotions about mindfulness developed or changed over the course of the last several weeks?

Just Mindfulness

In line with session 7, this week's practice is going to further challenge athletes to see how mindful they can be in any given moment of life doing regular, daily activities. To practice "just mindfulness," first tune into the breath or any other present-moment anchor. If athletes have not self-selected a general anchor by yet, it would be a great idea to identify one now. Some reminders include:

- A phone ringing or beeping
- Entering a space (e.g., new room, outside)
- The breath (as always)

Athletes may have different anchors, cues, or reminders in different environments. One's volleyball cue might be different from their cue at school because they take place in wildly different locations and different reminders are presently available. Some of the elephant

exercises are great examples of different cues athletes could use. If athletes are unable to decide, encourage them to continue trying different ones until they find one that fits and is meaningful for them. Some examples of anchors in the context of volleyball include:

- The sound of a whistle
- Water or water breaks
- The feeling of ball contact during play
- Returning to base position
- Team huddles between points
- Waiting in line during a drill
- The breath (as always)

After establishing an anchor, to practice “just mindfulness,” commit to doing an activity as mindfully as possible for as long as possible. There will come a time when the athlete realizes they have not been being mindful for maybe the last 10 minutes or so. That is okay and expected. At that moment, encourage the athlete to reign their thoughts back in and start over again. This time, trying to stay present and mindful longer than they were able to previously. The goal is to see how long one can be mindful while going through their daily activities. If athletes find this application of mindfulness super frustrating or difficult, that is okay. Revisit some of the lessons and keep practicing!

Mindful Volleyball Skills Progression

To begin, athletes should repeat the mindful stretching (session 4) and MV skills progression (session 7) as a warm-up. Afterward, athletes will progress to more advanced skills while being mindful. The MV skills progression activity is going to join mindfulness with more advanced volleyball skills. This particular format will outline certain drills, but leaders should make

adjustments as needed. These adjustments may depend on skill level (e.g., mindfulness or volleyball ability), type of player (i.e., position played), volleyball IQ, or comfort level with mindfulness. It is encouraged that leaders develop their own mindful drills as well for continued practice. Keep in mind what intention for practice is and develop drills with this intention in mind. In other words, what is it that athletes and leaders are looking to accomplish through this type of MV exercise?

As discussed above, have the athlete select a cue, or a reminder to stay present before beginning engaging in MV. This could be many things. In the past, athletes have used their breath a lot as the cue for being aware of the body. It could be one of the elephant exercises that have been discussed, such as feeling the *bottoms of your feet*. Other cues or anchors that are volleyball specific include the feeling of the ball during ball contact, the sound of a whistle, or every time one returns to base position on the volleyball court. These cues should be meaningful to the individual and help ground them in the present moment. For the purpose of this exercise, the athlete has chosen ball contact as the anchor that helps her stay present.

Combining skills: In session 7, the focus was on one particular skill (e.g., passing) at a time. The two drills for this session will include combining multiple skills (e.g., passing and attacking) in volleyball. “Pass to attack” is an individualized drill and “Team pepper” involves multiple members of the team and requires teamwork. Both drills will need a leader to help toss volleyballs. It is helpful if the leader knows what the athlete’s cue is before beginning. This is so the leader can remind the athlete of their cue and focus throughout practicing MV.

Pass to attack: During this drill, the athlete will get two touches on the ball before returning to the back of the line. Aligned on the left side of the court, the athlete will first receive a pass. This can be a pass off of a free-ball, down-ball, attack, or serve from the leader depending on both

volleyball and mindfulness skill levels. The athlete will pass the ball back to target. After the pass, the goal is to transition and prepare for an outside attack on the left pin. The leader will toss a ball for the athlete to attack out of transition. After attacking the ball, the athlete stands in line while the next player goes.

With ball contact as the cue, the player can decide if the anchor is her own contact with the ball off of the pass and attack or if it is the leader's contact with the ball to begin the drill. As a defender preparing to pass, focusing on the contact made by the attacker can cue athletes to stop their feet and then track the ball down for a pass. This drill presents several different opportunities for the athlete to practice using an anchor. Encourage athletes let go of judgments throughout the drill as they try different anchors to see what works well for them.

Some variations of the drill include working with a live setter versus a toss to the outside pin. With a live setter, another player can work on their mindfulness and volleyball skills and the passer has to work off of a live ball. This choice can be made by the leader or athletes together. Mindfulness skill and volleyball skill level should be considered when modifying the drill. To continue to advance the drill, the athlete could be asked to block, transition, and attack again after the first attack. Another modification could be having the athlete serve to begin the drill. After the serve, she would come into the court to receive the pass.

When leaders are considering modifications to this drill or any others, it is important to keep in mind what the intention or goal of the drill is. For the purpose of this program, athletes are focused on trying out and exploring different cues and anchors that work for them.

Additionally, the emphasis is on implementing these anchors during volleyball play so that athletes can work on bringing mindfulness into volleyball practice. Before leaders modify drills

based on skill level, they should check in with athletes to see where they are in terms of MV.

Some ways to check-in with athletes are:

- What is your anchor/cue? How are you using it?
- What does MV mean to you?
- What have you noticed about practicing skills mindfully?

Team pepper: This drill requires at least four people (two on each side of the net). The closer to six people on each side of the net, the more realistic the drill is for indoor competition. However, it can be run with 2 per side. First, a specific skill is selected. To start simple, the forearm pass was chosen. The ball can be initiated by a toss or down-ball from the leader or a serve from a teammate. Athletes keep the ball up and rally back and forth, counting the number of times that the ball goes across the net via a forearm pass. The goal of this drill is for the two teams to work cooperatively on reaching a certain number (e.g., 10). If the ball drops, the count returns to zero. If the ball crosses the net in a way that was not by a forearm pass, it is a wash and athletes keep counting from the number they are at. Once the goal has been met, athletes advance to another skill such as overhead passing, down-balls, open-hand tips, and attacking.

Team pepper differs from the other drills presented in the MV program. It is more dynamic and game-like compared to the controlled drills mentioned previously. Additionally, team pepper relies on the use of teammates for success. This could create a challenge for athletes as they now practice MV while sharing the court with other members.

Again, the drills listed in this section are merely suggested drills for practice. Any and all volleyball drills can be adapted to have a focus on mindfulness. It is important for leaders to know where athletes are at in their development of MV. It is likely that some athletes will need to spend more time on certain skills than others. The goal of MV is not to be able to practice

each and every moment 100% mindfully (that would be impressive), but rather to continue to expand and develop skills on and off the court that can lead to more mindful playing.

Just mindfulness and skills progression discussion: It is unrealistic to expect to be a master at mindfulness during performance at this point in training. Mastering anything takes thousands of hours. On top of that, practicing mindfulness while moving, especially in a dynamic sport is not an easy task. Be prepared to deal with athlete frustrations about having a wandering mind or not being able to pay full attention for long periods of times. Address these frustrations with a mindful approach. Remind athletes that striving for a certain outcome is not staying present and judging performances is not being accepting. However, every time the mind does wander, and athletes are able to rope it back it, they are further training their ability to monitor awareness and attention.

Additionally, the drill suggestions in this program are simply ideas for how mindfulness might look when it is incorporated into a practice session. The drills serve as a starting point for leaders and athletes and are in no way the only opportunities to bring mindfulness into volleyball. Use the liberty to adjust and adapt as needed for specific players. Bring this into the discussion. Leaders may find that there are a handful of players who really get one concept but struggle with another. Grouping these athletes together for practice can help to hold each other accountable and work through their strengths and struggles together.

Another point that might come up during discussion is frustration or anger that volleyball skills are not at the level they should be. MV requires athletes to think about the experience of playing volleyball in a completely new way. There may be times when performance slips because athletes are having to think about things that are different for them. They are not used to this. This is where it is very important to have the leader clearly articulate the intention of each

drill. If the goal for one drill at practice is to work on mindfulness and being present this needs to be clear to athletes. Instead of emphasizing perfect passes, if the intention is to practice MV, athletes should instead put emphasis on acknowledging anchors, staying present, practicing acceptance, and training awareness (or just focus on one of those). Use those as the markers of success. If the goal of a drill during practice is to have perfect passes, less emphasis will be on the mindfulness components. It might be important to remind athletes too that mindfulness is not about breaking down the skill to levels where it was originally learned. Athletes should not be over-analyzing their form and breaking down learned skills. Rather, it is about being present for each contact. This includes noticing how the body is feeling and what the mind is thinking. Simply noticing without interference. There will likely be much discussion following this practice. Some other suggestions for discussion include:

- How did you use your anchor/cue to help you stay present and mindful?
- What did you notice about your thoughts and feelings throughout the practice?
- What do you notice about your expectations or judgments about being mindful while playing volleyball?
- What benefits do you see from practicing MV?

At Home Practices

Along with the mindful stretching, spend time working on being fully mindful for at least two drills per training session throughout the week. Do one at the beginning of practice and one at the end. Additionally, three formal meditations are required this week. Be sure to track progress on the mindfulness log. Athletes may choose any of the following types of meditations:

- deep breath meditation (session 1)
- progressive muscle relaxation (session 3)

- mindful yoga (session 4)
- walking meditation (session 5)
- lake meditation (session 6)
- loving kindness meditation (session 8)

Elephant: “Rest your hands” (Bays, 2011, p. 87) is the elephant exercise selected for this week of practice. The goal is for athletes to let their hands rest and relax completely at different times throughout the day. Notice the different sensations when athletes have their hands still.

Incorporate brief PR by tensing them really tight (i.e., make a fist) and then relaxing. Notice the difference between the two sensations. Another way to notice hands is to simply rest them in your lap. This exercise is a great idea for setters. It is also an option to use as a cue to relax and be mindful during volleyball performance.

Reminders: New reminders should be implemented as new tasks and exercises are assigned. To continue with the habit of pausing, keep reminders and alarms on the phone or computer for adding pauses into the day. If athletes start to get used to a reminder being there, make an effort to change it so it catches the eye once again.

Final Thoughts

Bringing mindfulness into the sport context is not an easy task. It is a skill that requires a large commitment and a lot of consistent practice. Athletes should applaud themselves for making it this far in the program. It has likely not been an easy journey. Continue to work on mindfulness practices daily. Understand that mindfulness is a life-long commitment that can reap life-long benefits, if the commitment is there.

Most valuable lesson: Practice, practice, practice!!

Session 10: Maintaining Training

While some benefits of mindfulness training may remain even after the training has come to a halt, to get the most out of this type of training requires long-term commitment. Just as an athlete would not give up when they have reached a new personal record on their vertical jump or squat maximum, do not give up with mindfulness training! There is always room for growth with this life-long practice. This session emphasizes establishing a meaningful and appropriate practice for long-term adherence. Finally, resources are provided for athletes to be able to continue learning and improving on their mindfulness knowledge and skills once the MV program is finished.

This session includes:

- Start with your breath
- Practice discussion
- Continued practice
- At home practices
- Closing discussion
- Final thoughts

Start with Your Breath

Begin by starting with your breath (session 1). Allow athletes to settle into their seats or lay on the floor, wherever comfortable, and guide them to start by simply being with their breath for one minute. If needed, have a short discussion (2-3 minutes) on this experience. Consider how this exercise may change for athletes as their practice continues.

Practice Discussion

Invite athletes to have a discussion about their at home practice. It is recommended to spend 5-10 minutes on this discussion, but there may be reflections and observations that require more time. Suggestions for conversation include:

- How has your practice developed or changed throughout the program?
- What was your experience like with this week's elephant exercise?
- Which meditation has been the most meaningful for you?
- What have you learned from the MV program as a whole?

Continued Practice

Athletes have just spent 10 weeks training and re-training their brain. They have worked specifically on being aware, paying attention, and withdrawing judgment from experiences.

Athletes have explored a variety of different types of mindfulness practice including psychoeducation, informal and daily practices, formal meditation, and mindful volleyball. They have progressed from stationary meditation to practicing mindfulness while in motion, which is not an easy task.

Athletes might already be noticing changes in their perceptions of various experiences inside and outside of sport. Some research has shown that mindfulness can be effective after just one 30-minute session (Perry, Ross, Weinstock, & Weaver, 2017). However, long-term training (greater than 1,000 hours) in mindfulness practice may produce significant changes in the brain and the way it processes and functions (Zeidan, 2015). While it is okay to be satisfied with the changes and improvements from the current practice, research indicates that continued and sustained practice is best for the most desirable, long-term results (Zeidan, 2015). Finishing this program is just the beginning of what could be a journey to a more mindful life each and every

day. Beyond sport, benefits from mindfulness practice may flow over into other activities in life. Being mindful can also help performance at school or work, or with relationships.

Goal-setting: One way to commit to a long-term practice is to set goals. Research shows that those who set goals are more likely to actually reach them because goals help to direct attention and focus (Eiring & Hathaway, 2012). Another way to increase adherence to goals is to make sure that the goals are specific, measurable, and difficult, yet achievable (Gould, 2015). Having clear and concise goals can also help with knowing what has to be done to reach these goals. Goals should be so clear that someone *else* should be able to tell you when you reach your goal.

Beyond setting goals, tracking progress is an important aspect of reaching these goals. By keeping track of how one is actively working to reach goals, one can assess progress and setbacks, adjust behaviors as needed, and have data (e.g., a mindfulness log) that supports what they have been doing. To continue with mindfulness practice, it is recommended that athletes set goals and track their progress.

Maintaining practice: The mindfulness practices in this program include a wide variety of exercises. There may be a handful of meditations that really resonated with some athletes and other practices that were difficult or maybe even uncomfortable. That is normal and okay, everybody is different! While one may have a favorite practice that they commit to and practice most, it is important to continue updating and changing that practice every so often. This is for two reasons. First, this helps to prevent one's practice from becoming stale or boring. Second, returning to a practice after some time away can elicit different experiences than before. This is because meditation practice is constantly altering brain structure and subsequent perceptions and experiences. As athletes continue to grow and expand their mindful ability, they will find that perceptions of some meditations and mindfulness practices may change over time. For example,

if the loving kindness meditation was difficult at first, it might be a mediation to try again in a month or so and recognize how thoughts, feelings, or perceptions have changed or stayed the same with this particular meditation. Difficult meditations may become easy, new things may be learned about the self, or a new appreciation might surface.

Mindfulness practices are not limited to the ones that have been done throughout this program. There are thousands of different styles and lengths of formal meditations that can be accessed. The following categories of meditation were covered in this program:

- follow your breath meditation (e.g., start with your breath; session 1)
- yoga (e.g., mindful yoga; session 4)
- body scan (e.g., brief body scan and progressive muscle relaxation; session 3)
- walking meditation (session 5)
- meditation using imagery (e.g., lake meditation; session 6)
- compassion meditation (e.g., loving kindness meditation; session 8)

This list is minimal. Other categories of meditation include (but are not limited to) gazing meditations, meditation for sleep, and meditation for specific concerns such as anxiety or depression. Personal intentions for turning to mindfulness and meditation usually guide one's choice of practice. This is important to keep in mind. The practices used for this program were chosen due to their connection with sport performance.

Additionally, there are many different variations of each particular meditation. For example, there are a variety of body scans or progressive muscle relaxation scripts. Each one is unique in its own way. It is important to explore these and find ones that fit for style and intentions. Some body scans start at the head and work down to the feet while others work the opposite way. Certain body scans may focus on particular muscle groups or use different

descriptor words to describe the act of tensing and relaxing. Different guided meditations may play music in the background where others have white noise. For audio meditations, it is important to find a recording with a soothing and relaxing voice because some voices will be found irritating and uncomfortable. These all depend on each person's personal meditation preferences. There are countless ways to be creative and incorporate informal mindful practice into everyday life. There are no limits to the possibilities with mindfulness practices.

Staying with mindfulness and volleyball: As mentioned before, being mindful during complex movements such as playing volleyball can be a difficult task. Do not shy away from mindful volleyball because of the challenge. Continue to work hard and train the brain with each and every opportunity possible. If athletes noticed any changes in their thoughts, feelings, or volleyball performance after these first 9 weeks, imagine what kinds of differences can be created from continued practice.

As with all practices, it is important to have a purpose and be intentional. It might be easy to forget about mindfulness when at volleyball training because there are other aspects of the game to work on (e.g., passing form). Great progress takes great commitment. Be intentional. Schedule in time during every training to focus on mindfulness specifically as it relates to volleyball. Avoid boredom and keep practices interesting. Be creative. While MV is a difficult task to do, it can become easier with sustained practice. It may help athletes to have someone on-board for accountability. If a coach or teammate helps to remind athletes of their anchors and encourages them to keep practicing, it may be easier to commit to the practice.

Resources: With the growing popularity of mindfulness and meditation, there is an increasing number of resources available to practice mindfulness. Many books contain different scripts and exercises for practices. These books may often be for a particular type of purpose or intention.

For example, there are books on mindfulness in sport performance, mindfulness and anxiety, or even books specific to mindful yoga and other body movements.

The internet is loaded with resources as well. Different websites offer different audio recordings. Athletes should explore these to find some that resonate with them and how they like to practice. Depending on interest in mindfulness education, athletes can use the internet and books to search for different types of research on mindfulness and how it actually works in the brain. Social media provides plenty of opportunities for continued growth as well. There are countless Instagram and Twitter accounts that devote their feed to mindfulness practice. If athletes follow these accounts, they start to build mindful awareness into a very mindless task (i.e., scrolling through the internet). Following mindful social media accounts is another way to see reminders for practice throughout the day as well.

There are a large number of smartphone applications that can be downloaded free of charge and others that have fees. Many of these applications not only have suggested uses for practice and provide guided meditations, but they also track progress right there on the phone. Tracking typically includes length of session and number of practices or minutes per week. Some applications have different packages that take you through a step-by-step meditation program with specific intentions (e.g., mindfulness for better sleep) with each lesson building on the previous one. For visual learners or those who do not feel comfortable with having their eyes closed during meditation, many applications have visuals (e.g., scenes from nature or cartoons) that accompany meditation. This helps with both interest and learning. Take some time to explore these applications and download a few that resonate with you and your style.

At Home Practices

At this point in the program, athletes are on their own! Daily mindfulness practice is recommended to best reap the benefits of being mindful. However, remember that mindfulness practice includes many different forms. Practice could be formal or informal, but it must be intentional. I recommend sticking with some kind of formal practice at least four times each week. To help build this habit, it is suggested that to mediate at the same time each day, however this is not necessary. Build this priority into a daily schedule and stick to it.

Elephants: The final elephant practice is titled, “Notice trees” (Bays, 2011, p. 83). The challenge for this exercise is to try and notice things in the surrounding environment that have not been noticed before. A simple way to do this is by starting with trees. While outside (e.g., driving, walking) notice everything about trees. Notice where they are growing, their size, and their shape. Notice how they move, their roots, and their color. Trees might start popping up out of nowhere! Okay, not really, but by directing attention and becoming more aware of trees, it may seem like there are new trees everywhere. Giving trees so much attention may even spark a new appreciation for trees, their beauty and what they do for us, for animals, and for the Earth.

Notice trees is a practice that can be adapted in many ways to foster long-term use. After practicing noticing trees, move on to other things in the environment and surrounding areas. Maybe begin to notice clouds in the sky or the color yellow. Keep the challenge going by paying attention to new things. This is a simple, endless exercise that can help cultivate many facets of mindfulness including appreciation, awareness, acceptance, and presence.

My Reminders: New reminders should be implemented as new tasks and exercises are assigned. To continue with the habit of pausing, keep reminders and alarms on the phone or computer for adding pauses into the day. If athletes start to get used to a reminder being there, make an effort to change it so it catches the eye once again. Make reminders that are congruent with the goals

and intentions set for the week. It is important to check back into reminders when practice begins slipping.

Closing Discussion

Before concluding the program, take some time to have a discussion with the group about moving forward with mindfulness. Address any concerns and questions that individuals have about continuing with practice. Some individuals may not know where to start with goal setting or maintaining their practice. Others may fear slacking once the structure provided in the program ceases to exist. Some points for discussion include:

- What have you gained from working through this MV program?
- How do you plan to continue with practicing mindfulness?
- What resources can you access to help with maintaining practice?
- What are some obstacles that might get in your way? How do you plan to overcome these?
- What is your goal for mindfulness practice? How will you accomplish this?
- How will you continue bringing mindfulness into your volleyball training?

Final Thoughts

As the MV program comes to a close, remind athletes that this is just the beginning of what mindfulness practice can bring to their life. The benefits of mindfulness can continue to alter how the brain functions with more and more practice. Remind athletes to be clear in their goals and intentions with mindfulness practice and to seek out ways to be mindful that match their style and interest. By setting clear goals athletes are well on their way to a life-long practice of mindfulness that can be used in volleyball and throughout all other activities of life.

Most valuable lesson: To maintain an interesting practice, explore new types of mindful practice and re-visit old ones. Mindfulness can be a life-long practice with an unlimited amount of benefits both inside and outside of sport.

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Appendix A

A Review of Mindfulness and its Role on Sport Performance

The practice of mindfulness has been around for ages. Variations of mindfulness practices date back to use in Buddhism thousands of years ago (Keng, Smoski, & Robins, 2011). Research indicates that there are many psychological benefits of practicing mindfulness (e.g., Brown, 2015; Mannion, in press). These benefits include positive changes in the neural structure of the brain (Zeidan, 2015) and enhanced overall psychological well-being (Keng et al., 2011). Within the last two decades, there has been a growth in the amount of empirical research focused on mindfulness, specifically in the context of sport and performance (Mannion, in press). Although new to the practice of sport, there are a number of studies that provide support for the use of mindfulness by athletes within the sporting domain (e.g., Kaufman, Glass, & Pineau, 2018; Gooding & Gardner, 2009). The following is a brief review of what mindfulness is and how it has transitioned to be a key tool in the arena of sport and performance.

What is Mindfulness?

The definition of mindfulness changes slightly depending on who is defining it. The variation in definitions of mindfulness are a result of the wide range of traditions, practices, and contexts where it exists throughout the world (Quaglia, Brown, Lindsay, Creswell, & Goodman, 2015). Jon Kabat-Zinn, a leader in mindfulness teaching and research, simply describes mindfulness as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4). Mindfulness can be considered a skill (Eiring & Hathaway, 2012). Each individual has a different level of this skill that can be improved upon through practice (Quaglia et al., 2015). Mindfulness practices are strategies or techniques (e.g., meditation) that help build the skill of mindfulness. To be mindful is to intentionally be aware of

and accept the present-moment experience (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). While there are many different interpretations of Kabat-Zinn's definition of mindfulness, awareness, acceptance, and presence are the three main components that exist in most definitions and applications of mindfulness regardless of the purpose or intention of the practice (Quaglia et al., 2015).

Eastern to Western Shift

According to a review by Keng, Smoski, and Robins (2011), the practice of mindfulness is historically part of the spiritual aspect of Buddhism, and in this context, is considered important to practice along with other Buddhist teachings. The differences between Eastern and Western cultures play a large role in the conceptualization of mindfulness and how it is practiced (Gardner, Moore, & Marks, 2014); however, this discussion is beyond the scope of this paper⁴. In short, mindfulness practice is embedded within culture and part of the everyday lifestyle for many who practice in Eastern societies.

The intention of mindfulness practice has looked markedly different in Western societies. The practice of mindfulness was brought to America and Western culture in the mid-20th century where it initially gained the interest of researchers in America (Keng et al., 2011). Instead of being embedded in culture as a way of life, mindfulness was studied to gather empirical data. Researchers were interested in the effect mindful practices have on one's psychological well-being, especially in clinical populations (e.g., clients with depression; Keng et al., 2011). Kabat-Zinn (1994) differentiates Western use of mindfulness from traditional practice:

“This relevance has nothing to do with Buddhism per se or with becoming a Buddhist, but it has everything to do with waking up and living in harmony with oneself and with the world. It has to do with examining who we are, questioning our view of the world and

⁴ For more information on these cultural differences as they pertain to mindfulness and mindfulness practice, see Quaglia et al., 2015.

our place in it, and with cultivating some appreciation for the fullness of each moment we are alive. Most of all, it has to do with being in touch” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 3).

Kabat-Zinn points out that the typical look or tradition of mindfulness may differ from culture to culture, but the underlying purpose or values of the practice stay in-tact even when crossing between cultures. While differing in how it is practiced, both Eastern and Western cultures share the same goals for practicing mindfulness. In short, mindfulness is a path to improve the quality of life and minimize negative experiences for those who practice (Gardner et al., 2014).

More on Mindfulness

Based on the definitions discussed above, mindfulness generally is considered paying attention to one’s present-moment and accepting these present-moment experiences without judgment (Bernier, Thienot, Codron, & Fournier, 2009). Mindfulness can further be conceptualized as a trait-like mechanism or a state mechanism. State mindfulness is considered a particular experience or current state of awareness (e.g., Bishop et al., 2004). As a trait, mindfulness is considered one’s general mindful states over a period of time (Quaglia et al., 2015). Trait mindfulness ranges on a continuum (i.e., low to high) and can vary from person to person based on mindfulness training or natural differences including genetics or socialization (Quaglia et al., 2015). Although one’s trait mindfulness may start out at a particular level, it can be increased through mindful practices (Kaufman, Glass, & Arnkoff, 2009). Both state and trait mindfulness can be quantitatively measured through various assessments (Quaglia et al., 2015). Another way to conceptualize mindfulness is to break it down into its three main components: Awareness, presence, and acceptance.

Awareness: Intentionally being aware of experiences requires awareness of the self and awareness of the surrounding environment. With heightened awareness of internal (e.g., thoughts, feelings) and external (e.g., the environment) experiences as a result of mindfulness practice, one can better regulate or control their awareness and then use this ability to make intentional changes in unwanted habits (Keng et al., 2011). For example, increasing one's awareness may allow an athlete to begin to notice when they start to get angry or upset during a competition. This anger could be a reaction to a particular event (e.g., not getting the ball) and may distract the performer. With heightened awareness from engaging in mindfulness practice, the athlete may be able to learn to react in a more productive way (e.g., stay calm) when the play does not go their way. In other words, through increasing awareness, one can work to intentionally change unwanted or unhealthy habits (Eiring & Hathaway, 2012).

Presence: Some refer to being present as a state of awareness that is opposite of having a wandering or distracted mind (Parker, Nelson, Epel, & Siegel, 2015). In the present moment, one is focused on the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that exist in the here and now as opposed to any thoughts, feelings, or behaviors that are relevant to a past or future event. It is common for minds to wander away from what one is currently experiencing. While sitting in traffic, one may be thinking about arriving at their destination (i.e., the future). An athlete preparing for a serve might begin to think about what happened as a result of their previous time at the service line (i.e., the past). Mindfulness practice helps to monitor the mind and re-direct attention to the appropriate present-moment focus when needed (Parker et al., 2015).

Acceptance: Lastly, accepting experiences as they are shows that an individual does not have any judgment about the current experience. This non-judging attitude allows for acceptance of what is. As a result, there is less stress and emphasis on changing what exists or *should* exist and

more emphasis on acknowledging and enjoying the current experience (Brown, 2015). There may be a time during competition when a referee makes a call perceived as poor or biased. Many athletes might complain or argue about the call, which could result in feelings of frustration and lead to poor performance. By learning to accept the call as something that is out of the athlete's control and eliminate judgment (i.e., good, bad), the athlete can re-focus their attention on more important aspects of the competition (e.g., their performance). Along with freeing up space for a new focus, practicing acceptance can cultivate feelings of kindness and compassion for both the self (Keng et al., 2011) and others (Brown, 2015).

Mindfulness Practice

There are many ways to apply mindfulness in *practice*. Mindfulness is a skill that requires application and practice for one to become more advanced, just like learning a new skill in sport. Mindfulness practice may be a sustained program or intervention that takes place over a period of time (e.g., 6 weeks; Aherne, Moran, & Lonsdale, 2011) or a brief intervention (e.g., 30 minutes; Perry, Ross, Weinstock, & Weaver, 2017). Researchers suggest a positive correlation between amount of practice and benefits experienced (Kaufman et al., 2009). Additionally, those with over 1,000 hours of practice have seen the most significant changes including alterations in how the brain processes information (Zeidan, 2015). There have been a range of techniques used for mindfulness practice within the literature. These include lectures and psychoeducation (e.g., Zhang et al., 2016), and informal practices such as self-help workbooks (e.g., Teasdale, Williams, & Segal, 2014), daily awareness exercises (e.g., Bays, 2011), and guided practice (e.g., Mardon, Richards, & Martindale, 2016).

Another way to practice mindfulness is through formal practices such as meditation (e.g., Scott-Hamilton, Schutte, & Brown, 2016). In Western culture, the word meditation is often

misinterpreted. It is not a magical picture of someone sitting on a cushion chanting quietly to themselves in nature. Rather, meditation is one of the many ways to practice being mindful. It requires stopping for some time and simply being present (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Meditation may take many forms such as walking meditation (e.g., Radford, 2018), standing meditation (e.g., Kabat-Zinn, 1994) and meditations that require the use of imagery (e.g., lake meditation; Potter, n.d.). At the end of the day, meditation is but one way to work on mindfulness skills. The way one practices mindfulness should align with their goals and intentions for bringing mindfulness into their life.

Overall, there are myriad ways that mindfulness can be incorporated into one's life. Whether it is part of a lifestyle, or it is an intervention for clinical benefits, mindfulness has found ways to be present in a variety of cultures with a variety of different needs. While definitions vary depending on the origin and use of mindfulness, most agree that mindfulness encompasses awareness and attention to the here and now, without judgment about the experience and with the goal of improving an aspect of the individual's life.

Benefits of Mindfulness Practice

Mindfulness serves as a way for individuals to become aware of their present-moment functioning. Through this awareness, one is able to take a step back from automatic thinking. Practicing mindfulness allows individuals to become aware of their automatic responses to situations which then can lead to changes in behavior if desired. With this present-moment awareness that accompanies being mindful, individuals are able to make choices about how to think or act that better align with what they are feeling and experiencing (Brown, 2015). Through this process, changes in the neural structure of the brain produce many psychological benefits (Zeidan, 2015).

The shift of mindfulness into Western culture has been impactful in many different ways. Research findings indicate that mindfulness can play a role in cognitive functioning, emotions, interpersonal relationships, and other positive functioning. Cognitive benefits from mindfulness practice include increases in one's ability to direct and sustain attention, more efficient use of attention, better responses when confronted, and changes in working memory (van Vugt, 2015). In a review on emotional benefits of mindfulness, Arch and Landy (2015) found positive changes in regulation of emotion and negative affect after a brief, 15-minute intervention. In longer interventions, individuals had decreases in fear, worry, and rumination and experienced meditators had increased tolerance for painful stimuli (Arch & Landy, 2015). Other notable benefits from mindfulness practice include higher ratings of subjective well-being and increases in self-compassion (Brown, 2015). Relationships may improve as a result of an increased sense of trust and closeness following mindful practices as well as feelings of empathy and understanding others (Brown, 2015).

Other research in this domain focuses on the variety of psychological benefits that come as the result of mindfulness interventions used with clinical populations. Keng and colleagues (2011) summarized what are considered mindfulness-oriented interventions. These interventions are empirically-based programs for use with certain populations that have set structure, practices, and intentions (Keng et al., 2011). Some examples include: mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR; Kabat-Zinn, 1982), mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT; Teasdale, Segal, & Williams, 1995), dialectic behavior therapy (DBT; Linehan, 1993), and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT; Hayes, Luoma, Bond, Masuda, & Lillis, 2006). Each of the aforementioned therapies are based around mindfulness either through teaching mindfulness skills or implementing an integrated mindfulness practice.

A review of these therapies indicates psychological benefits for various clinical populations such as people with chronic depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, and substance abuse (Keng et al., 2011). As an individual increases their mindful experiences (via the interventions mentioned in the previous paragraph), many psychological enhancements come about. These include increased life satisfaction, pleasant affect, and self-esteem as well as decreased thought rumination and anxiety, and less difficulty regulating emotions (Keng et al., 2011). Other changes discussed as a result of the therapies include changes in how the brain functions, such as improvements in working memory, which plays a role in one's attention (Gardner & Moore 2012).

While the former psychological benefits were found using self-report measures, the latter alteration in the brain was studied with technology that can show neurological and physiological changes as a result of mindfulness practice (Gardner & Moore, 2012). Other neurological benefits from mindfulness practice include changes in perception of emotional intensity and pain with mindfulness and meditation practice (Zeidan, 2015). Those with higher levels of trait mindfulness have lower stress levels as shown by lower neuroendocrine stress reactivity (Zeidan, 2015) and lower cortisol levels (Parker et al., 2015). It has been mentioned that mindfulness can improve emotion regulation. Support for this is shown by lower activity in the amygdala, which regulates emotions (Zeidan, 2015). Another interesting finding is that mindfulness practice can increase telomerase activity, which is a predictor of longevity and cellular aging (Parker et al., 2015). Although mindfulness therapies were initially focused on use with clinical populations, the research has extended to non-clinical populations as well.

The many benefits that come from the practice of mindfulness in various clinical and non-clinical populations also are hypothesized to be psychological benefits that can enhance

performance for athletes. Different approaches have been modeled from the aforementioned therapies to serve as a basis for mindfulness to be incorporated in performance-related domains. Athletes are constantly challenged to make quick and appropriate decisions, stay focused, control emotions, and bounce back from mistakes. Recent research includes new mindfulness-based models in the sporting context and promotes the practice of mindfulness techniques while engaging in sport or exercise (e.g., during cycling; Bryan & Zipp, 2014).

Switching Arenas: Mindfulness and Sport Performance

Since the early 2000s, there has been increased interest in the impact that mindfulness has on sport performance. Preliminary studies have been conducted in sports ranging from darts (e.g., Zhang et al., 2016) to basketball (e.g., Gooding & Gardner, 2009), and include athletes from local (e.g., Josefsson et al., 2017) to national playing levels (e.g., Mardon, 2016). Mindfulness has been addressed as a mechanism that both directly influences performance (Perry et al., 2017), and one that indirectly influences sport performance through factors such as decreasing sport-related anxiety (e.g., Röthlin, Horvath, Birrer, & Holtforth., 2016). Because of the brevity in research, it is important that conclusions are not overstated. However, the research that exists is a sound starting point for this quickly growing field and has several practical applications in sports across many contexts.

Why Sport?

“All great athletes know the feeling. They use different words to describe it. They’re on autopilot; they’re tuned in; in total control; in the groove; locked... Tennis star Arthur Ashe called it ‘playing in the zone’” (Mack & Casstevens, 2001, pp. 169-170).

In the “zone,” as referred to above, is an experience sought after by performers, including athletes; it is an experience so rare and so enjoyable that it sometimes does not feel real (Mack &

Casstevens, 2001). It is a time that seems to exceed typical levels of performance, often defying excellence (Krane, Williams, & Graupensperger, in press). Described as the “essence of the athletic experience” (p.170) by former National Football League player Dave Meggysey, and “dream-like” by former Major League Baseball pitcher Jim Hunter (Mack & Casstevens, 2001), the zone often includes stellar performances where things are happening flawlessly, and effort feels minimal. While in the zone, thoughts are not disruptive to performance because the performer is so completely absorbed in the present moment activity (i.e., their sport; Krane et al., in press). The experience often is hard for performers to put into words.

What Ashe, Meggysey, Hunter, and many others are conveying when recalling moments of being in the zone, is what researchers call being in a flow state. Flow is considered an antecedent for optimal performance and includes being fully involved in the present task at hand (Krane et al., in press). Much of the interest of mindfulness in sport has to do with increasing the opportunities for athletes to reach this level of peak-performance or flow state. Athletes must actively focus on the present moment, while dealing with internal (e.g., thoughts) and external (e.g., the crowd) factors, to have their best chance at experiencing flow while performing (Zhang, Chung, & Si, 2017). Training how to be fully attentive and accepting of the present moment, without any judgment (i.e., being mindful), may help athletes reach this much sought-after flow experience.

Benefits of Mindfulness in Sport

Practicing mindfulness can elicit many positive changes in functioning that are beneficial for sport. There are several characteristics of flow that overlap with components of being mindful, such as a total concentration on the present task and the loss of self-consciousness (Kaufman et al., 2018). Research in this area indicates that having a higher level of mindfulness

is positively correlated with an athlete's ability to have a flow experience (e.g., Schwanhausser, 2009; Scott-Hamilton et al., 2016).

Athletes are constantly required to pay attention to a variety of things while performing. Think about a setter on the volleyball court: She has to be able to focus on the physical task of setting, orient herself to the ball (i.e., move her feet to where the pass goes), make the appropriate decision about where to set the ball, decide what type of set to do, and execute all of this well for the best chance of success. All the while, she is assessing the other team's defense, where the block is going to be, and who on her team is in the right position to make the play needed to win the point. To add to the stakes, she might be distracted by the noisy crowd, her previous mistake, or thinking about the test she failed earlier in the afternoon (i.e., the past). All of these components combined are fighting for her limited mental space. Practicing mindfulness includes directing and sustaining attention to different, relevant stimuli. Through this practice, athletes can gain the capacity to direct and maintain attention to where it is needed (Kaufman et al., 2018). Additionally, those with higher levels of trait mindfulness use less mental energy which can allow them to detach from negative aspects of attention (e.g., distractions) that may try to take over (Kaufman et al., 2018).

Beyond attention, mindfulness is correlated with a variety of mental and emotional states that relate to sport performance. In a sample of 133 athletes from 23 different sports, researchers found that self-reported trait mindfulness was negatively associated with cognitive and somatic anxiety before a competition (Röthlin et al., 2016). Athletes who self-reported higher levels of trait mindfulness reported lower scores on pre-competition anxiety, including feelings of nervousness and thoughts related to self-doubt (Röthlin et al., 2016). Further, Röthlin and colleagues (2016) found that athletes who reported high levels of cognitive anxiety had

impairments when performing in high-pressure situations, indicating that mindfulness may be a useful tool for athletes who have to perform under great pressure. Similarly, Josefsson and others (2017) reported that higher trait mindfulness scores indicated better emotion regulation and decreased rumination on negative thoughts. After learning about mindfulness, their sample of 242 competitive athletes from six different sports also reported better coping skills when sport challenges were presented. The researchers concluded that mindfulness may influence coping abilities in sport through emotion and thought regulation (Josefsson et al., 2017). In other words, the way athletes respond to stressful situations can improve with mindfulness training (Kaufman et al., 2018).

Gooding and Gardner (2009) examined the direct relationship between trait mindfulness and actual, physical sport performance. They found a positive correlation between trait mindfulness and in-competition basketball free-throw percentage in their sample of 43 men from National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I teams (Gooding & Gardner, 2009). Interestingly, these researchers did not find a relationship between competitive anxiety and mindfulness but suggest that being mindful, even if experiencing anxiety, was key to better performances in their sample (Gooding & Gardner, 2009).

The studies mentioned in this section support that higher levels of mindfulness can benefit sport performance. Beyond emotion and attention regulation, higher levels of mindfulness may also increase processing speed when making decisions (Mannion, in press). In his review, Mannion (in press) also describes benefits such as improved sleep and greater immune functioning, life satisfaction, and stress management. He goes on to note other benefits including higher satisfaction in relationships, tolerance for pain, levels of awareness and

concentration, and levels of self-compassion (Mannion, in press). While all of these results will likely benefit performers, the next question is, how do athletes work to become more mindful?

Training the Athlete: Mindful Interventions in Sport

There have been two prominent approaches to using mindfulness in sport: The mindfulness-acceptance-commitment approach (MAC; Gardner, & Moore, 2004) and mindful sport performance enhancement (MSPE; Kaufman et al., 2009). While still very new in the field of research, both of these approaches have been utilized as mindfulness interventions to enhance performance in the athletic realm. Because of their influence on the proposed project, the following sections will summarize these two main approaches linking mindfulness to sport performance enhancement.

Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment approach. Gardner and Moore (2004) first introduced the mindfulness-acceptance-commitment (MAC) approach as a spin-off from ACT and MBCT (both mentioned previously) to be used specifically for the enhancement of sport performance. MAC consists of five phases that can be offered in group sessions (eight sessions, 1.5 hours each) or for individuals (12 sessions, one hour each; Gardner & Moore, 2004). The phases include: psychoeducation, mindfulness, value identification and commitment, acceptance and integration, and practice (Gardner & Moore, 2004). Briefly, the psychoeducation phase includes a rationale for the intervention and is where athletes begin to develop their awareness of performance. Phase two introduces mindfulness, including its relationship with peak performance and suggests various exercises for practice. Phase three emphasizes acknowledging personal values as a key element for goal setting. This phase guides the athlete in exploring ways to align their values with their actions. The fourth component connects thoughts, feelings, and

behaviors, and the last phase incorporates all previous lessons into sport and daily life (Gardner & Moore, 2004).

The MAC protocol sparked many researchers to use MAC as the basis for their mindfulness interventions in research. Schwanhausser (2009) utilized the MAC protocol in a case-study with a springboard diver after making slight alterations to the program for the purpose of using it with an adolescent (age = 12 years). The MAC-A (MAC- Adolescent) included seven modules with the flexibility to spend more or less times on modules as necessary (Schwanhausser, 2009). After the 9-week intervention, the diver had self-reports of increased focus regardless of emotions or other distractions (e.g., fear). Following the intervention, the diver had an increased ability to reach a flow state, indicated by increases in general flow state measures on the post-test compared to the pre-test (Schwanhausser, 2009).

Zhang and colleagues (2016) examined mindfulness and performance in beginning dart throwers. The 8-week intervention was based on MAC and included dart practice throughout. As a whole, all who participated in the study increased significantly in dart throwing performance, whether they engaged in the mindfulness intervention or not. Once the intervention concluded, the mindfulness intervention group had no further changes in dart throwing performance at a 2-week follow up. However, the other group (i.e., those who had not received the mindfulness intervention) had a significant decrease in dart throwing performance (Zhang et al., 2016). This led researchers to suggest that mindfulness may be a factor in maintaining athletic skills such as dart throwing even once a mindfulness intervention has concluded (Zhang et al., 2016).

Another group of researchers shortened the MAC protocol to one 30-minute session and introduced it between two putting performances in a group of 65 undergraduate students (Perry et al., 2017). The intervention was adapted from the first two sessions of the MAC approach and

included a definition and examples of mindfulness, discussion, a brief centering exercise, and ways to adapt what was learned to putting (Perry et al., 2017). While putting performance did not significantly differ between groups prior to the intervention, there were differences in putting performance for the follow-up. The group that received mindfulness training did significantly better while putting compared to the group who did not receive the mindfulness intervention. Rather, performance in the group that did not receive the mindfulness intervention decreased, leading Perry et al. (2017) to suggest that mindfulness may have prevented a decrease in performance in the experimental group.

Mindful Sport Performance Enhancement. MSPE is a progression-oriented protocol that includes six 90-minute sessions for athletes (individuals or groups) and coaches adapted from concepts of MBSR (Kaufman et al., 2018). Educational components, various experiences and exercises, discussions, at-home practices, and worksheets accompany each of the six sessions. Each session builds off the previous and moves the learner from education to sedentary practice, to practice in motion, and finally practice within the sport context. The sessions include: building mindfulness fundamentals, strengthening the muscle of attention, stretching the body's limits mindfully, embracing "what is" in stride, embodying the mindful performer, and ending the beginning (Kaufman et al., 2018).

Session one, building mindfulness fundamentals focuses on introducing mindfulness and how it relates to sport. This includes discussing why MSPE benefits performance, the expected commitment to mindfulness training, and includes a few applied exercises to jump-start the intervention. In session two, five main facilitators for performance are introduced and connected to peak performance and flow. A guided body scan exercise is introduced as well. Stretching the body's limits mindfully incorporates movements through yoga and discusses the concepts of

limits and expectations. The fourth session advances to a walking meditation, encouraging participants to be mindful in motion. Finally, mindfulness is added to sport performance in session five and session six provides opportunities for reflection and discussion of how to continue practicing mindfulness following the conclusion of the program.

While still in its early stages, research on MSPE has some practical preliminary findings for use with athletes. The first study using MSPE was with seven archers and 14 golfers, all of whom followed the original version of MSPE as a group for four 2 ½ hour sessions (Kaufman et al., 2009). Following the MSPE protocol, archers had a significant increase in levels of trait mindfulness and optimism, while golfers experienced a significant increase in flow dimensions (Kaufman et al., 2009). Not all participants attended all sessions. Following the program, the researchers noted that there was a correlation of .43 between trait mindfulness and the number of sessions attended indicating a benefit from more consistent attendance (Kaufman et al., 2009). Other results displayed an increase in confidence and decrease in thought disruption for the archers and a decrease in golf score on 18 holes for the golfers, but these results did not reach significance.

Following a similar protocol but adapted for long-distance runners, 22 runners participated in a MSPE program (De Petrillo, Kaufman, Glass, & Arnkoff, 2009). Results showed a significant increase, from pre-test to post-test, in mindful attending in the moment and a significant decrease in aspects of perfectionism and sport anxiety (De Petrillo et al., 2009). Additionally, experiences of state mindfulness increased for participants between the first and the final session of the MSPE program (De Petrillo et al., 2009).

An updated version of the MSPE program was used with NCAA Division III athletes from a wide variety of sports. Pre- to post-intervention ratings for flow increased significantly

for all athletes who participated (Mistretta, Glass, Spears, Perskaudas, Kaufman, & Hoyer, 2017). Other benefits from the program were higher levels of self-rated performance, overall life satisfaction, and a slight decrease in depressive symptoms (Mistretta et al., 2017). Once again, there was a correlation between the amount of practice (e.g., at home practice or number of sessions attended) and positive results for this sample (Mistretta et al., 2017). Beyond the quantitative results discussed, qualitative responses from participants and their coaches about the MSPE program were positive and encouraging (Mistretta et al., 2017).

Other mindful practices in sport. Using an intervention based on cognitive behavior therapy, a group of researchers led an 8-week mindfulness intervention with 47 competitive cyclists (Scott-Hamilton et al., 2016). The intervention included mindfulness training during bicycle spinning, educational workshops, and at-home meditation practice. Results indicated that the participants who completed the training had a greater increase in trait mindfulness and flow ratings compared to the untrained cyclists (Scott-Hamilton et al., 2016). The researchers also measured sport-related pessimism and found that the group who received the mindfulness intervention had less pessimistic attributions at their post-test than the control group. Additionally, the experimental group had a significant decrease in sport-related anxiety when comparing the pre-test to the post-test assessment (Scott-Hamilton et al., 2016).

Benefits from mindfulness training are not limited to those athletes who are having problems in their sport and are seeking help. Aherne, Moran, and Lonsdale (2011) conducted a mindfulness intervention with 13 athletes at national and international levels, who were not seeking professional help for sport performance. The intervention included a one-page informational sheet about mindfulness and 6 weeks of mindfulness training. The mindfulness training was via guided meditations on a CD titled “Guided Meditation Practices” (Williams,

Teasdale, Segal, & Kabat-Zinn, 2007), where four specific exercises were chosen for practice: breath, breath and body, standing yoga, and body scan (Aherne et al., 2011). Results indicate increases in aspects of flow for the half of the athletes who received the intervention.

Similarly, Mardon, Richards, and Martindale (2016) used a 6-week version of the intervention described by Aherne and colleagues above (“Guided Meditation Practices”), with six national-level swimmers. These athletes showed improvements in attention and swimming performance (Mardon et al., 2016). In interviews, the participants also noted increased feelings of relaxation around competition and improvements in their focus. It is important to note that these high-level swimmers also felt that the mindfulness training protocol was “flexible and easy to fit” within their schedule (Mardon et al., 2016, p. 137).

Practical Implications

Whether a volleyball player cannot seem to let go of a mistake made on a previous point or is distracted by the excitement of being at game-point, her attention is not on her present-moment performance. If a volleyball athlete is reacting with anger to a missed touch call by the referee or giving in to her fatigued legs from long rallies, she is not accepting what is currently happening. The player who makes poor decisions when overloaded with information or fatigued is unaware of her surroundings. These also are all scenarios in which mindfulness training may be able to help the athlete let go of judgment, stay focused on the moment, and direct attention and awareness where it is needed most, allowing her to perform at her best.

Research shows a wide variety of benefits that result from the practice of mindfulness skills (e.g., Mannion, in press; Kaufman et al., 2018; Gooding & Gardner, 2009). Positive changes in overall psychological well-being, regulation of emotion and attention, feelings of compassion, and enjoyment are examples of how mindfulness can benefit one who practices. Not

only do these results positively impact everyday life, they can have a positive impact for the performing athlete. Besides increases in mood and enjoyment, increasing one's trait mindfulness can influence their ability to reach flow states and peak-performance, something that coaches and athletes strive to maximize through training.

The growing body of research connecting mindfulness and sport presents a promising view of integrating mindfulness into sport routines. Based on the research provided, the Mindful Volleyball program presented specifically for volleyball athletes and coaches, may increase mindfulness skills and subsequently have a positive impact on sport performance. Through the practice and implementation of this program, which includes a variety of mindfulness exercises, volleyball athletes can learn about the fundamental concepts of mindfulness and then harness their mindfulness skills to utilize them during sport.

Appendix B

Mindfulness Log⁵

Week of:

Formal practice: Track your use of the formal practices throughout the week. Note any observations that you notice come up. Bring to your next session to discuss.

Goal =

Date & time of day	Minutes practiced	What I practiced	Comments (e.g., thoughts, feelings, sensations)

This week's elephant exercise is:

Place a check mark next to the days where you remembered to incorporate the elephant exercise.

At the end of the week, write down any observations about this practice.

Monday:

Tuesday:

Wednesday:

Thursday:

Friday:

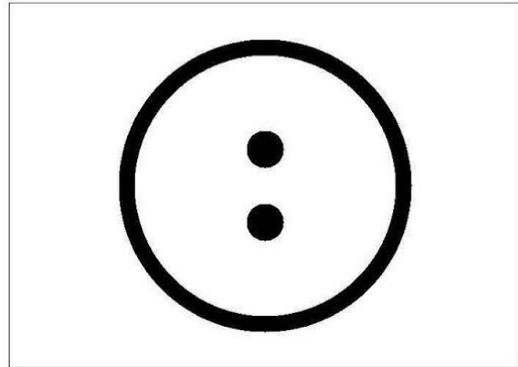
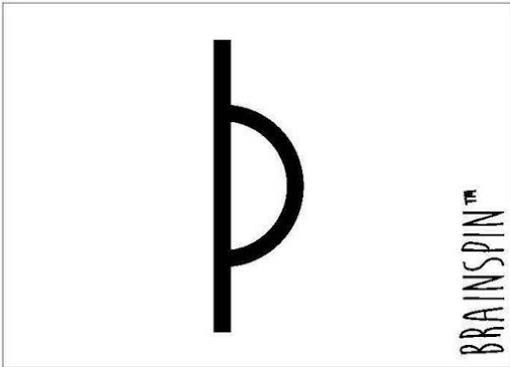
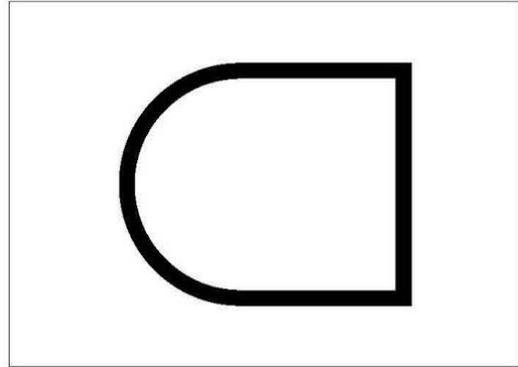
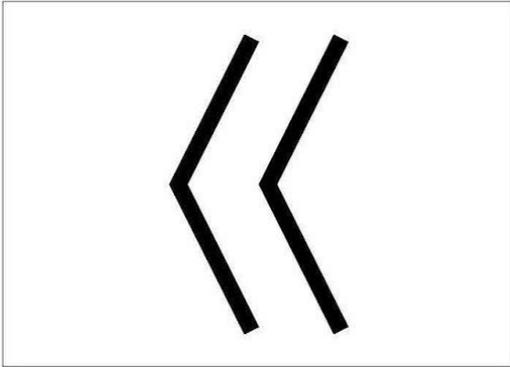
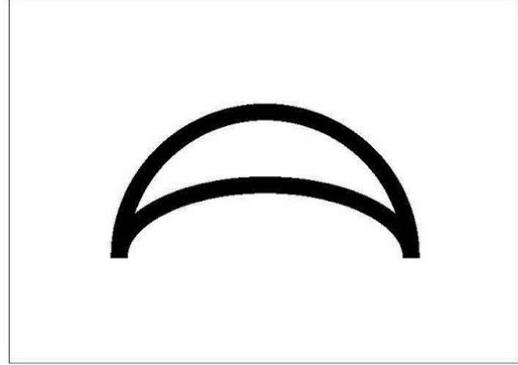
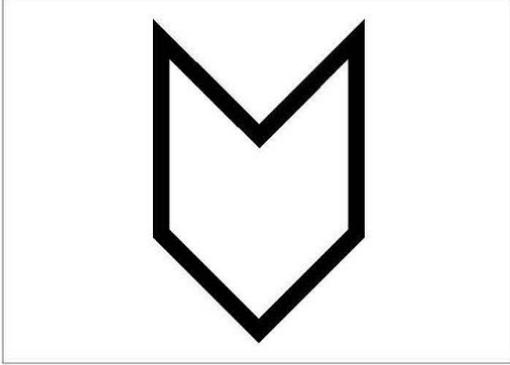
Saturday:

Sunday:

Notes:

⁵ Adapted from Teasdale, Williams, & Segal, 2014 and Kaufman, Glass, & Pineau, 2018.

Appendix C



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