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RESILIENCE AND MINDFULNESS IN SPORTS

Hello everyone, welcome to this amazing session on Mindfulness and Resilience in Sport. In the previous session, we had spoken about how we can build resilience when it comes to organizations and teams. In this particular session, we are going to be talking about mindfulness and resilience. Let us just take a minute watching this particular image which is on the screen. You can see a tree, you can see water and you can also see some pink flowers if you look closely at the image. So, what we are doing is basically we are just being mindful.

We are looking at things the way they are and accepting things the way they are. So, that is what mindfulness is, being very non-judgmental towards your experience, not thinking and worrying whether it is good or bad, but we are just looking at things the way they are. Mindfulness, self-compassion you know, helps us in building resilience. In fact, in Brené Brown's research, she did find across a number of people who were wholehearted and who were courageous enough and stayed very vulnerable even during the toughest times because they really practiced mindfulness.

So, let us look at what these strategies are for developing mindfulness. I remember having this discussion with a particular coach and he was saying that athletes look at hobbies also as something where they would want to have a yardstick, even for hobbies because it no longer becomes a creative expression because it becomes a yardstick for performance. When you are focusing on your hobbies, it just has to be a creative outlook. It has to be a creative expression because sport is there for performance. So, you do not need other outlets where you can just creatively express every emotion of yours.

But then when you start making a performance out of the hobby, then it becomes difficult.

So, here is an athlete, this is something she enjoys doing quite a bit. She ends up taking images, she enjoys photography especially because it lets her be free. It really helps her connect to nature, helps her connect to herself and helps her bring back to her authentic self. And she really enjoys this as much as possible because it takes away the pressure from performance to a large extent.

I think fun, rest and creativity also helps you to bring yourself back to the present moment. Of course, there are a number of breathing techniques which help you with mindfulness, but apart from this there are also creative ways, fun ways in which you can help your mind be more coming back to the present moment. So, look at this beautiful art which has been done by one of the amazing athletes. So, she actually spoke about how she feels there is a creative expression that her art gives her and that helps her even in the sport to a large extent because she knows that if she can problem solve this, she can also do something amazing even on the field. The other thing is also with respect to art, it helps in building mindfulness.

So, you can see that there is so much detailing and depth in the work of these two athletes and there is I mean and there is so much creativity which is there. So, mindfulness can be built in multiple ways. Maybe you can practice mindful walking, you can eat gently and slowly, chew every particular taste of the food, enjoy the flavor of the food, focus on the taste rather than your thoughts or it can be with respect to mindful walking where probably you are connected to the nature, you can walk barefoot that makes you feel extremely good as well or probably you can paint, you can color. In fact, during COVID time I remember some of the athletes saying that other than sport we really had to engage in other things and be more mindful of what we are thinking because quarantine used to be for a large number of days and it was very difficult for them to just do anything with respect to sport because most of the sport was not really happening. So, art really helped a lot of them because they also spoke about how the second time they had to quarantine because the first time they did not know what would happen.

The second time they had a lot of art materials with them and the athletes spoke about how that helped in helping them be more mindful. And the other thing we also do with respect to mindfulness on the field is practice your mental skills with the physical skills. So many times we basically, I mean when I work with coaches, you know coaches and I, we set a target like they have the physical sport skills the athlete practices but apart from that they also practice

something like what, today along with your sport skill you are going to think of letting go of your mistakes. Even if you make a mistake you come back to the present moment. If you basically make a mistake you are going to think about practicing self-talk, a lot of positive self-talk.

You can today along with your sport skill you are going to be very confident. Today along with the sport skill you are going to communicate a lot as a team. So these are some of the things that can actually help you be more mindful on the team, more mindful with your players, in your relationships, etc. So in this particular session we have spoken about how you can build resilience and we have also spoken about how mindfulness and resilience really helps athletes to lead a wholehearted life. And so with this we have come to an end of the theoretical lecture on resilience.

And in the next section we are going to be having a discussion on mindfulness and resilience with Dr. Chaitanya Shridhar. Thank you.

Today we are going to be talking and looking at the discussion on resilience and mindfulness. So I would like to begin with a quote which I happened to see recently.

The dawn of beauty always comes after night. Wow! Right? I saw this and it had this beautiful image of course an elephant which caught my eye and the sun was just coming up. So there is the tree and the leaves and the sun is just coming up. So it was such a beautiful image and I think even Anam Khara talks about it. The darkest hour of the night is just before dawn. Right? So I thought this was really nice to start the discussion with.

And let us start with mindfulness right? What are your thoughts about it? What comes to mind? I think mindfulness is definitely like being present, coming back to the present moment. I am thinking of flow. Yeah. Right? Yeah. It is so intermingled right? Like really being in the here and now and I think as you are talking and I think this image, being a Jungian psychologist as well, we talk so much about images and see how rich and potent it is right? Like just the sun coming up and being in the here and now right? Like mindfulness is also like what Djokovic was saying.

I have gone off, how do I come back? Right? Because I think that is what you know a lot

of times when athletes have not had a good performance right? What they end up telling you is I do not want this to happen and I always kind of go, can you catch yourself? You know and one of my trainers very recently said something he said, notice when you are getting triggered. Yeah. When is your body responding? And I think that is really what is to be mindful right? And I think, also when we are talking of mindful right? I remember seeing this image. One is mindful when you break it M-I-N-D hyphen F-U-L-L which is what we call the monkey mind and your mind is just constantly on a run and the other is the full word mindful M-I-N-D-F-U-L and what we really trying to see and it is such a thin line no Priyanka? When you can jump from this end to that end and I think that that really is the key. Yeah and from what you were speaking one thing which really stood out for me was you know the need to control.

Yeah. Which is coming in. Yeah. Especially catching yourself like I do not want this to happen.

Right. Right. Yeah. So, when you are trying to control something I am just wondering are you really mindful? Yeah. Yeah and I think there was this conference I attended in Nimhans sometime back. I think not sometime. quite a while back. When I was just beginning my practice and it was on one of the meditations and someone asked and it was also a question I had very honestly was, so how does it help? Let us say you do any meditative practice right? And then how does that help you in life, in sport and we are talking of sport right and I remember that lady, of course it was a senior faculty, saying that is what you are tuning your brain for right? And I think what really is being mindful, what really is you know? Even when people say I meditate okay sometimes, they use it for imagery. They use the word for everything and I always say what really is being mindful is focused attention right? The right attention. It could be like I am really enjoying this conversation with you.

Me too. I am being in this right? So we are in synergy and I am not thinking of okay what am I going to have for lunch. So, I think that really is the thing that brings you to that focused attention.

Yeah. So, maybe we can go with ourselves first and then we can look at how we also bring it into sport. Yeah definitely. Now, I just want to say that our mind and our senses are so strong just like when you spoke about lunch.

I am thinking of. Sorry that was not the intention. But then I am saying that okay even though I am thinking of food, how can I come back to the present moment and focus on this discussion. Yeah. And how can I focus my energy here right now because I am not really hungry.

Right. It is just that it is, I love what you bring in because what you brought in because I try to explain mirror neurons or how you are drawn to something. Sorry Priyanka I am going to bring in the example that you took. Let us say your favorite food, you just came back from school or college work and your favorite food, you see it on TV and you might actually not really be hungry currently like Priyanka is not. But I want to because I am. Yeah I got a thought about this. There is an association.

And I think that is what it is because I think we can also bring in this. So, let us try this because this was an exercise I used to do quite a bit okay? So, I want you to think about anything and to the audience except a white monkey. You can think about anything else okay? But I am thinking of a white monkey.

Yeah. So, if the white monkey comes to you, try to shoo it away okay, just try to take it away. So, anything but a white monkey. Right. So, what happened Priyanka? Talk us through what really happened. So, I am able to see the monkey more clearly.

So, I can see the image of the monkey being more vivid and very clear. Right. So, of course the audience must be thinking what are these two psychologists actually trying to do here?

Yeah. But trust me I love what you said because this is a very good way to actually understand what happens to us right? And I remember I was giving a talk at one of the pools in Bangalore and it was after one of the major events. So, they had not performed so well. And I like to begin with instead of saying okay be mindful, be this to give an idea as to what is it that you were focusing on? So, you know I tried this exercise and then I was asking you know people and one of the Olympians okay?

So, he said ma'am you just went on so much, I was trying to think of something else and the monkey was swimming with me. And that is the power. So, I on purpose went on saying

you can think of anything but a white monkey.

So, what was my emphasis on? So, this is where we come to and then we shift. So, the exercise is basically to recognize what do I want and then what am I focusing on? I did not want Priyanka to think about a white monkey but I kept emphasizing.

Yeah. So, I am still thinking about a white monkey. Right. And now we bring it back. So, see, she shifted from food to white monkey.

Yeah. And then as we move on the discussion shifts and that is what it is to become mindful, to become aware and so what helps you Priyanka. So, what are the things that really help, be it let's call it being mindful or we can even call it like focused attention. Yeah. So, I think for me, what really helps is just thinking about what is important for me right now. For me it is not the white monkey which is important or the food which is important but right now the discussion is more important.

Exactly. Conversation with you is important. Yeah. So, I think about that and that helps me focus my attention on okay what is actually the need of the hour. Yeah. Right. And where should my energy be? Brilliant. So, that is all I do. That is a wonderful way especially when you are in crux, you are in a match, your mind goes off, you come back or maybe you could not save that four or you do not start off but like okay that is, how do I come back and also using probably some body cues.

Yeah. Yeah. And then the other thing that we need to look at is how do I connect again? A little bit to flow and start centering myself. So, doing it also outside my sport. Yeah. So, for example, I know for me it is nature. So, I get up in the morning and I connect. There is this beautiful tree and then of course I have my dogs.

So, that really holds. Yeah. So, for each individual what is it that holds for that particular person and you have zoomed out of everything else and just zoomed into this. Right. Yeah. Yeah. So, I have my mind as we are talking about this. My niece is coming to my house.

Wow. Yeah. She is just a year and a half but she is so in tune with what she is feeling. Yeah. Every time she has to climb the stairs she says bhaya which means I am scared, I am

scared. But every time I tell her that okay just breathe, breathe, calm down she is actually able to go out and do it.

Right. Yeah. That is so beautiful. I think children and animals, they are so much in the now. Yeah. And I think if I have to say, it is like just the way my dogs actually read me they are like okay have I done something, is she angry or so the tone they watch your body. And I think with elephants you have to be fully present. There is this little one whom I call nothing else. Her attention is just on me and what she wants is also your full attention. After that you go talk to others, do everything and that is perfectly fine.

And I think this is beautiful to build into players and teams as well right? Yeah. Absolutely. So, yeah, yeah. What do you think about how players can be really mindful or conscious or focused during a practice game, especially during a tournament? I think it is the same strategy in terms of where do you want to focus your energy on?

And there are of course various ways to come back into the present moment. It can either be through your breath, it can either be by if it is overwhelming. Yes. So, talking about it to somebody can help you just ease off the burden and help you come back to the present moment.

Yeah, yeah. And like the way you said nature. Yeah. Nature is a beautiful way to play. Exactly right. You know having an anchor right? Yeah, you are right because this one of the golfers I was working with was extremely anxious. And also so when you are anxious what happens you are rushing through.

So I always ask athletes what in your arena, in your sporting arena holds you? So for a lot of swimmers for example, it would be the water. So I go like look at you know feel into the color blue. What blue is it? So then and again it is nature. And with golf thankfully it is open. So one of the exercises we do is connect to your senses as well, right?

So what is it that immediately catches my attention? Is there a bird flying? How is the flight? So what happens is you have disconnected from that previous shot which might not have gone well or it is gone well but then you also prepare for the next. So it can become one of your pre-shot routines or pre-game routines as well. Absolutely, absolutely. Yeah.

And like the way you are saying everything becomes important.

It is not just you need to be mindful during the competition. Yes. But what you do, the process before that. Yes. Like the way you said the routine. If you are not mindful then and you are expecting yourself to go out there and perform that is really not going to happen.

Right. Yeah right. One of these marathoners I remember. So what happened was they missed the bus. So a couple of them missed the bus. And this was a guy who would go too much in the head and then he said I was so angry we missed the bus. So by the time I came, my routine and my warm up everything got delayed.

And thankfully this was not at the Olympics, okay? But so I said well it is good it happened there because next time we are going to face delays and especially when you go to an event like this everything is not in our control. The food might not be the way you like it. You might end up getting up late. So then you go okay this happened I have to come like what you said at this point of time what needs my attention.

Right. This is something I tell players as well. Does this need attention now? Is this important at this point of time and also is this helpful? If it is a no, how do I come back into my bubble? What is going to help me and I think that is very very vital.

Yeah yeah that is great. So let us look at resilience shall we. Yeah I can see Priyanka really. I really like this topic. So what is resilience to you? What comes to mind when you hear resilience? I think strength, courage.

Ability to bounce back. Yeah absolutely. Do you have the quote that you started with? Yes yeah that was a beautiful one. That comes to my mind. Yeah and is there any player coming to mind immediately? I think I am thinking of injuries.

I am also thinking of probably success. Sometimes I am also thinking of failures. Every single thing requires resilience. To be successful you need resilience, if you are in a slump you need resilience to bounce back. And when you have an injury and to move forward from that particular injury you need resilience.

Yes, exactly right? And I think that is what we actually advise athletes is that listen, you are never you know at least I haven't met a single athlete till date whose journey has been like all the way up. You are always going to have a little bit of that. That's what it is right, like the curve is going to be. And also to remember that this is a journey and it doesn't end here. And I want to bring this example. He was very influenced by Milkha Singh and a very great runner I was working with.

I think he was one of these **gala tops athlete**. And he came from a very very humble background. A lot of kids at home hardly had enough to really survive. He didn't even have shoes and then someone was supporting him in the beginning and he just really came. And there was this point of time when there was some slump, there were a couple of issues. But he said and then he would talk in Hindi and he's like mam itna kuch saha hai.

Right like so much is happening that this really is not so big. And sometimes when he would really be going down, I would remind him like look what you've achieved, where you've come. And I think Priyanka so I really feel also resilience is really testing yourself. Testing the waters because if we over cocoon, when we see athletes coming from very over cocooned families I feel they're not hardened enough. It's like any little wind and they kind of get shaken. And I remember this athlete just went through so much and he would come back. I remember when Irrfan Pathan actually spoke about this, it was one of the matches and he just started his career and he wasn't having a great day as such.

And so the captain throws the ball at him and it's like practically the last over and so you can imagine what he would be feeling. So then he says, they went through so much hardship. So apparently he says I just remembered how tough life has been. So to defend, I think they had to defend five runs if I'm not wrong. So he's like what do I have to do? I just have to defend this much.

And immediately it shifts things right? Whereas if you'd gone like oh my God it's five runs and I was giving this example in another place where like we can catastrophize it. It's not going to be the end of the world because and that doesn't mean they've not gotten serious but that means that they've shifted it to listen this is doable. Yeah absolutely. And that's one of the most important qualities of having a resilient spirit, like? Feeling confident that I can move through this situation.

Yeah yeah exactly. Otherwise you can just crumble and feel the pressure and you will not be able to perform. Yeah exactly.

I remember one of the Olympic qualifying team swimmers and this swimmer had previously, how sometimes they've missed it by a very small fraction. He looked so stressed, his eyes were fully red. He was so tense and he was really not listening but he just went with okay I know this okay but what if I don't make it then at the end almost to the flag and I said okay I'm going to ask you a question.

I'm like what if you don't make it? Are you going to stop swimming? I actually asked this but I asked it with a lot of compassion and he looked at me and then he said no. Then I said then why are you focusing on catastrophizing because then your body is not energized. You're not energized, you're probably not sleeping well, you're probably you know you could be training so much better if you went with, maybe this is my chance right?

And I think really that's what it is, no? To go like what Bindra did right? The first time he didn't, we keep coming back to Abhinav because I feel he led the way to what I want my story to be, right?

I really feel that. I think we all end up thinking only about the end result but resilience is a process. Yes, process and I think, hope is a very essential ingredient in it. Yeah. Victor Franklin, he was with the, what's that called he was in the concentration camp and he's written this book and he says people who get through and people who don't become sour because you're seeing life dead torture, is the one who holds hope.

And also how do you live through the day not dragging it but making the best with play, with fun using your creativity and imagination. And I think he also talks about someone who falls in love in the camp and how that became an essential holding. So I feel like that's what we do as psychologists. Because when your athlete or the team is not able to hold, we bring that in.

Yeah absolutely. I think hope really gives some purpose to life. It really makes you feel so joyful even during the most difficult period, that there is light. Exactly right. The light, the dawn. I think that quote seems to be playing in this space today.

So do you want to share maybe an example of an individual or a team where we really had to build resilience? Does anything come to mind? I'm just thinking of the qualities.

Yes for example creating a very safe space for players. Yeah I mean it was the whole teamwork. The coach ended up creating the safe space, the support staff created a safe place so that players can be very upfront because so many times what happens is with respect to communication they don't open up. They want to keep quiet because they feel that, oh if I say these things maybe I will not be selected.

So basically creating such a safe space that they can come and talk about anything which is actually bothering them, something that we really focused on and that helped in helping them focus on the performance. Because they knew that they didn't have to be something else. They can just be the authentic self and go out there and play rather than worrying whether I will be accepted this way?

Yeah so you're also saying that very subtly we do influence performance but without over focusing on it. Yeah right.

I want to share this, I think this is a good example. With one of the young athletes. So she had a major, almost career ending injury and they're so focused on it right? I think my rule of thumb is 15 minutes let them talk let them in and then slowly, how do you shift? So there was this day when she was a little too much in the head and all that and she liked a little bit of attention. So she was someone who would put up all these videos and all. So I'm like oh I saw this. This was nice and all that and then slowly I shifted.

I said what's going to be a message? So I just took out my phone and I said I'm going to record. What's going to be your next chapter? And then first she was like I'm going to talk. I said no you can't talk like you're talking to your side you will have to like how will you?

And you know I'm like what's going to be your body language? What are you going to do? And I had this like you don't know me and just it shifted and she went on for 15 minutes non-stop and it really shifted and I think That's an example in itself right?

You somewhere have to also play with it, play with how do I move this athlete from a little dejected state to building up this athlete? Building their resilience and now she's doing extremely well. That sounds very good. Very very profound. Yeah yeah I mean it's so nice right like I think because I feel that's also where it's such a satisfying field where you get to really hold when someone's low.

And then when they make it also knowing that this is so nice. We didn't see and we didn't lose an athlete there. So yeah. So that was lovely.

Is there anything you'd like to add in this section, Priyanka? I think it was so beautiful because we spoke about mindfulness, we spoke about how resilience is so important and how mindfulness and resilience are so well connected. And the essential ingredient is hope. It's like this little tadka or what you call titration in chemistry, your catalyst which makes all the difference. So we hope. We instilled some hope and that you start building these concepts in. So thank you. Thank you.