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Mindfulness to Optimize Mental Health in Sports: Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to synthesize and critically appraise recent empirical evidence on the role of mindfulness in optimizing mental health in sports, particularly among athletes and coaches. **Method:** This study employed a systematic literature review using the PRISMA guidelines. Articles were searched through ScienceDirect and Google Scholar using the keywords mindfulness, sport, and mental health. The inclusion criteria covered English-language, open-access journal articles published between 2020 and 2024, involving athletes or coaches, and discussing dispositional mindfulness, mindfulness practice, or mindfulness-based interventions. After screening 65 full-text articles, 14 studies met the eligibility criteria and were analyzed narratively. **Results:** The findings indicate that mindfulness contributes positively to sports performance and mental health outcomes. Mindfulness-based interventions were reported to improve resilience, self-confidence, emotion regulation, subjective performance satisfaction, mindful awareness, well-being, and sleep quality. In addition, mindfulness helped reduce stress, anxiety, depression, tension, and the likelihood of choking during sports performance. **Novelty:** This review highlights mindfulness not only as a psychological training strategy for enhancing sports performance but also as a promising approach for optimizing mental health in sports. The study also identifies the need for more rigorous randomized controlled trials with larger samples and diverse sports contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Athletes' goal in competitive sports is to pursue optimal performance. Over the past decades, sports psychologists have developed diverse psychological training approaches to help athletes promote their competitive performance. Performance and success in sports rely on physical and psychological capacity and readiness. For this purpose, athletes must successfully deal with discipline-specific requirements and potential disturbances. Various forms of mental training might contribute to physiological and psychological performance surrogates or performance outcomes (Bühlmayer et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2023)

One such form is psychological skills training, which generally refers to cognitive behavioral techniques, including goal setting, imagery, mental rehearsal, arousal control, self-talk, and pre-competitive routines. Mindfulness practice is another form of mental training that is becoming increasingly popular with athletes. Mindfulness has raised increasing concerns, but it has shown great potential for promoting athletes' competitive performances as an alternative to traditional psychological training approaches.

The term mindfulness is derived from Eastern Zen (Kabat-Zinn, 1994), which is defined as nonjudgmental, conscious, purposeful focus, understanding, and acceptance of the things around one in the present moment (Bishop et al. 2004). In contrast to traditional behavioral therapies, mindfulness emphasizes that individuals should be aware of and experience their internal and external thoughts and feelings without any judgments. Every individual can be mindful, especially when consciously carrying out behavior. However, a person's capacity to