

# locker room activity: an informal mindfulness practice 19

Talking about attitude, Lleyton Hewitt, the youngest top-ranked male singles tennis player said, “Matches are won and lost so many times in the locker room.”

In moments of adversity, it’s often the player or team with the most poise and positive focused attitude that will prevail. Attitude and level of confidence play big roles in an athlete’s ability to be resilient and perform at a high level. Even if you don’t win the game, a positive attitude will allow you to bounce back more quickly from a disappointing loss or poor performance.

You may be thinking *How can I have a positive attitude and raise my level of confidence if I’m feeling beaten down after?* A lot of it has to do with the contents in your locker—your mental locker.

## the mental locker

Your mind is a lot like a locker!

- ✓ Finding things in it can be difficult.
- ✓ It can hold a lot of different things.
- ✓ It can often get overstuffed.
- ✓ Sometimes you can get lost looking in it, and ruminate over things that happened or get overwhelmed by worries.
- ✓ Some of its contents are clean, new, and helpful (like the confident thought *I can get a hit against any pitcher*) while others are wet, smelly, and of no use (an anxious thought like *I always struggle playing away games*).

activity 19 \* locker room activity: an informal mindfulness practice

You can be in a hurry to change and quickly throw stuff into your locker or equipment bag. At other times, you're not rushing so you hang out by the lockers and chill.

Your mental locker is similar. Sometimes your mind is in such a rush with so many different thoughts that you may not realize you've been thinking and talking so negatively. Other times you may notice what you're thinking because you slow down and hang out with your mind. Once you begin to see how your thoughts impact your behavior and your performance, you can start to choose different, more confident and positive thoughts and attitudes.

## take a look in your mental locker

So what's in your mental locker right now—thoughts about how tired or sore you are; judging thoughts about teammates, coaches, or opposing players; frustrated thoughts about lack of playing time; unconfident thoughts about how hard something is? List these thoughts here:

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Just as items get forgotten about, lost, or dirty if your locker isn't cleaned out from time to time, your mind needs the same attention and care to its thoughts. You need to be aware of your negative thoughts because they influence your behavior and can lower your confidence and decrease your performance.

What items (negative thoughts) do you have that need to be cleaned out? You can look at what you wrote in your previous answer to help you.

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For example, perhaps you're very hard on a teammate or yourself after a loss or poor performance and say unkind words. This then negatively impacts both of your confidence levels in the next game. Or maybe you're overconfident about playing a less talented team, thinking you'll win before you even take the field. This attitude might lead you to start being careless with the ball and make some silly mistakes during the game.

List some of the negative, nonhelpful thoughts in your mental locker here:

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## how to keep your mental locker clean

Just like having to clean out the junk from your locker during the season to make room for new equipment, you could benefit from replacing some negative attitudes and patterns of thoughts as well.

What new thoughts or attitudes could you add to your mental locker to help you or your teammates keep more positive, especially when things get tough?

For example, a runner who used to tell herself *I hate to train hard because my calves always hurt the next day* could instead think, *When I train hard, I know my muscles are getting stronger so I can be faster for the next race.*

List your positive thoughts here:

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game time mindful takeaway      Be mindful of your mental locker, which can be filled with negative thoughts that need to be cleaned out. Begin to pay attention to how your thoughts and internal conversations (negative and positive) impact your behavior and your performance. Then you can start to choose different, more confident and positive thoughts and attitudes if you need to.

## something more

### *creating your sports mantra*

A *mantra* is a particular word or phrase you can repeat to help keep you focused when you start to feel the pressure of a sports situation. If you're a long distance or track runner and have a tendency to start thinking negatively when you get off to a slower start, a good mantra might be "Even strides even things up."

Think of a mantra you could silently repeat to help get you focused and calmer when you get stressed during your sport.

Write it here: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How do you feel when you read it?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What thoughts come to mind when you read it?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# mental toughness 25

Lynn Jennings, one of the best American female long-distance runners of all time, said, “Mental will is a muscle that needs exercise, just like muscles of the body.”

Mentally tough athletes have a stronger ability to focus, rebound from failure, handle pressure, and persist in the face of adversity. In other words, they are resilient and perform at a higher level. Mental toughness is a skill you can develop and increase.

## the 4 Cs of mental toughness: *control, commitment, challenge, and confidence*

**Control** means the extent to which athletes feel in control of their lives, their circumstances, and their emotions. How much control do you feel right now as an athlete?

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**Commitment** describes the degree to which athletes are prepared to set goals for what they want and how hard they work to deliver on what they set out to do. How committed are you to your goals?

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**Challenge** illustrates how athletes will push their limits, embrace change, and accept risk. Do you see adversity as an opportunity or a threat?

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**Confidence** is an internal belief in your own sports abilities and how you handle conflicts and challenges on and off the field. How confident are you in your sports abilities?

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## exercising your mental will

On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being the highest in mental toughness), how would you rate your current level of

**Control** \_\_\_\_\_

**Commitment** \_\_\_\_\_

**Challenge** \_\_\_\_\_

**Confidence** \_\_\_\_\_

Any of the components of mental toughness can be enhanced. Choose one of the 4 Cs you wish to increase at this moment and write about it here.

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## enhancing mental toughness with positive self-talk

Positive self-talk uses short, memorable, present-based, positively worded messages for keeping your mind focused on the good. Imagine encouraging a friend during a difficult time. Those kind, optimistic words are the ones you might use with your own positive self-talk.

While the majority of positive self-talk takes place in silence in your head, it can be both instructional (“Keep focused on the ball”) and motivational (“I got this”).

Below is a list of messages that athletes often use when talking to themselves. Place a *P* next to those that are positive self-talk and an *N* next to those that are more negative or neutral self-talk.

- \_\_\_\_\_ I’ll get the next one.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I should’ve made that play.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Make solid contact.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Take a deep breath.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Reach.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lean forward.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I give up.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Stay alert.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I’m not good enough.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I can do this.

game time mindful takeaway      Remember, the key to using positive self-talk is to use words that are short, memorable, optimistic, and based in the present. Mentally tough athletes make good choices about what they choose to think and use as self-talk.

## something more

### *your positive self-talk statements*

All-Star pitcher Andrew Miller said, "Confidence is this game. That's what it's all about." Increasing confidence will increase your overall mental toughness. In order to be more resilient, come up with three or four of your own positive self-talk phrases that you can use during a game or competition. Remember to keep them short, positive, easy to remember, and based in the present. List your positive self-talk phrases here.

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