

# EDGE OF CHAOS

## MINDFUL ATHLETE TRAINING



FEBRUARY 2022

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## THE ASCENT

### THE MAT TEAM

We continue to strive for great content and hope you enjoy our February issue of Edge of Chaos! The *Edge of Chaos* is the transitional zone of bounded instability that engenders a constant dynamic interplay between order and disorder (Complexity Labs, 2016). Physicists have shown that adaptation to the *Edge of Chaos* occurs in almost all systems, given feedback. If there is anything you would like to see featured or changed, please let us know at [info@mindfulathletetraining.com](mailto:info@mindfulathletetraining.com). Enjoy this month's edition!

## THE CHAOS CORNER: STETSON BENNETT'S JOURNEY

By Christian Franco



A core belief at Mindful Athlete Training is that stress and chaos are required for high performance. University of Georgia's quarterback Stetson Bennett's journey encompasses this philosophy, as he showed last month in the National Championship Game against Alabama. With the odds stacked against him for much of his college career, he showed on the biggest stage that no feat is impossible when you embrace the chaos.

An Atlanta, Georgia-born native, Stetson Bennett grew up a huge football fan. He quickly became a star quarterback in high school, while most colleges said he was too small and too light to succeed at the next level. Nonetheless, Bennett decided to walk on to Georgia and made the roster in his first year. However, he did not



take a snap the entire year. Having limited playing opportunities, Bennett made the difficult decision to transfer to Jones County Junior College in 2018, where he played for a year. The following year Bennett returned to Georgia and was named the second-string quarterback, which he served as for two years.

In the 2021 season, Bennett made his first start as QB after starter JT Daniels went down with an injury. Bennett threw for five touchdowns, tying a Georgia record. After the impressive performance, Bennett was named the starter for the rest of the season and led the team to a 12-0 season- a true underdog story.

In the SEC Championship Game, Georgia lost 41-24, and Bennett was highly criticized for his performance. Many believed JT Daniels should be the starter for the following Bowl games, but head coach Kirby Smart trusted Bennett and stuck with him. This trust paid off, and he took Georgia to the College Football National Championship against the heavily favored Alabama Crimson Tide. Despite constant doubt if he would be able to handle college football's biggest game, Bennett led his team to a stunning 33-18 victory and was awarded Offensive Player of the Game. It was Georgia's first National Title since 1980 and one of the most shocking title-game upsets of the past few years.

Chaos can be manifested in many different ways. For Bennett, his entire football journey was filled with adversity, as he bounced back and forth between schools and never got a real opportunity to show his potential until his senior year at Georgia. He is the definition of an underdog, as he was always the backup or third-string, but when given the opportunity, he rose to the occasion. It would have been easy for him to give up and submit to his chaotic experience, yet Bennett embraced the chaos, tied a Georgia record for touchdowns in his first real game, and led his team to an undefeated season, going on to win it all. When asked about his experience, Bennett said, "Keep your mouth shut and work hard. Life is tough. Work through it." Stetson Bennett is a perfect example of how embracing your situation and remaining steadfast despite obstacles can ultimately pay off, because in life, you never know when you'll get called into chaos. The question is, will you embrace it?



# TALK LESS, DO MORE: STRESS MANAGEMENT USING BIOFEEDBACK

By Jim Wing



What is stress? According to the dictionary, stress is a state of mental tension and worry caused by problems stemming from work, daily living, or other factors. We all experience stress in our daily lives. Work stress, family stress, and relationship stress, to name a few. Stress has a knack for creeping up on you, and without effective stress management skills, before long, it may begin impacting your quality of life.

Stress can lead some to become hot-

tempered and irritable, others shut down and withdraw, and still others turn to drug or alcohol abuse in an attempt to cope. Stress can not only negatively impact interpersonal relationships; it can also have long-lasting negative impacts on your physical health and wellbeing. This impact can manifest in digestive problems, headaches, muscle tension and pain, heart disease, heart attack, high blood pressure and stroke, sleep problems, weight gain, and cognitive impairment. Additionally and perhaps most importantly is the severe effect stress can have on your mental health, as it is linked to depression, anxiety, and the emergence of various mood disorders. As seriously problematic as too much stress can be, how can Mindful Athlete Training help?

At Mindful Athlete Training, we use biosensor technology not only to improve peak performance but also to manage stress, especially in athletes. Biofeedback is the use of technology to show a person their physiological state in real-time. For instance, our Calm equipment shows minute by minute a person's level of synchronicity between sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. Why is this important? Essentially, when the body is in a state of stress, it engages the parasympathetic nervous system, which promotes the fight or flight response. Just as our ancestors would need this fight or flight response to escape the jaws of a saber-toothed tiger, we too get the same activation from our own stressful situations in present day. This response is helpful by keeping us prepared in the face of danger, but being in a fight or flight state for prolonged periods, such as with chronic stress, leads to the aforementioned adverse effects. By contrast, the sympathetic nervous system exists to balance this response and can be activated with specific coping techniques taught in our lab. The best part is, you don't have to take our word that these techniques will help; you can see your emotional state right in front of you on the screen. By

seeing what a stress versus calm response visually looks like, these coping mechanisms are reinforced. The person can then begin to associate feelings with both stress and calm, better understanding them and knowing when to make a shift.

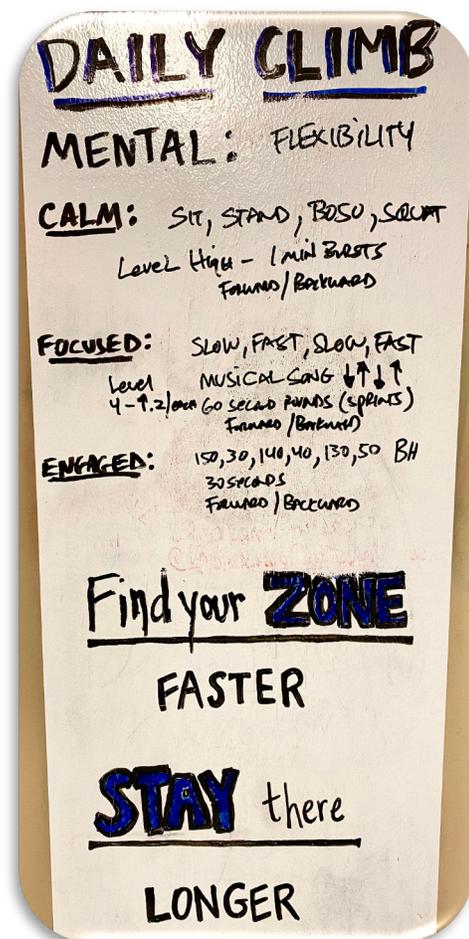
Biofeedback technology has been around since the 1960s and is continuously improving and becoming more accessible. Few have been trained in biofeedback technology, and fewer integrate it into their mental training sessions. However, biofeedback should be an integral part of stress management, as it can significantly magnify positive effects and is great for athletes and regular joes alike!

## THE LAB: EXPLORING A DAILY CLIMB

By Jordana Ambros

If any of our readers are familiar with CrossFit, they will also be familiar with the Workout of the Day, or WOD. The WOD is precisely how it sounds; it identifies what specific exercises, weights to use, and how many reps you will be doing that day. When you enter our Lab at Mindful Athlete Training, you will start with the Daily Climb written on our board; this is our mental fitness version of the WOD. Each Daily Climb includes specific exercises at each station (Calm, Focused, and Engaged): how many reps, how long each activity will be, and any other necessary instructions. Each Climb is based on one of our four pillars: Mental Strength, Endurance, Recovery, and Flexibility. Strength is the ability to push through adversity and accomplish a task, Endurance is the power to be present in the moment, Recovery is the ability to return to a normal state of mind and health after experiencing a stressful situation, and Flexibility is the readiness and willingness to adapt to a given situation. Each of these pillars will utilize different workouts with these specific objectives.

We call our workouts Daily Climbs because the journey to peak mental fitness can be like climbing a mountain; it requires a series of steps over time and is best achieved through daily practice. Our Daily Climbs are the steps you take to reach your personal summit.



To give you an idea of how we create these climbs, consider mental strength. Again, we define mental strength as the ability to withstand pressure. This pressure can come from internal or external stressors, so we want to put the performer in a stress-provoking environment when creating a strength exercise. An example of how we achieve this is by having a catch with the coach while balancing on a Bosu ball and listening to crowd noise through headphones. In this scenario, the performer faces external stressors while also focusing on their balance and completing the catch. This particular exercise is considered Mental Strength because it is necessary to remain calm and focused in this situation; by putting these skills to the test, we can strengthen them in the presence of chaos over time. Remaining calm in stressful, distracting, and unplanned situations is crucial because it allows the performer to make better decisions, manage their emotions, and build confidence. Thus, withstanding the pressure of this challenging situation in our lab will translate to better decisions, better emotion management, and more confidence in real-life situations outside of our lab. An entire Daily Climb workout, including an exercise at each station, will last around 45-50 minutes. Take the first step of your climb today with Mindful Athlete Training!

## MENTAL STRENGTH TRAINING FOR TODAY'S ATHLETES: WORKING WITH A SOCCER PLAYER (PART 2)

**By Priscilla Wiggins**

In our first newsletter of 2022, you can read about our specific mental fitness training through the lens of a soccer player. As a former collegiate soccer player myself, I've had the opportunity to conceptualize our training through the lens of both a coach and an athlete, and I am excited to showcase some of our elite athletes and competitors in coming editions.

Maddy McGettigan first came to Mindful Athlete Training in 2019 and quickly found how applying aspects of our training can elevate her game. One of the things that stood out the most was working at the Calm station to help regulate her breath and body during competition, which helped to make her more composed and relaxed on the ball. As a central midfielder, Maddy plays a unique role in bridging the offense

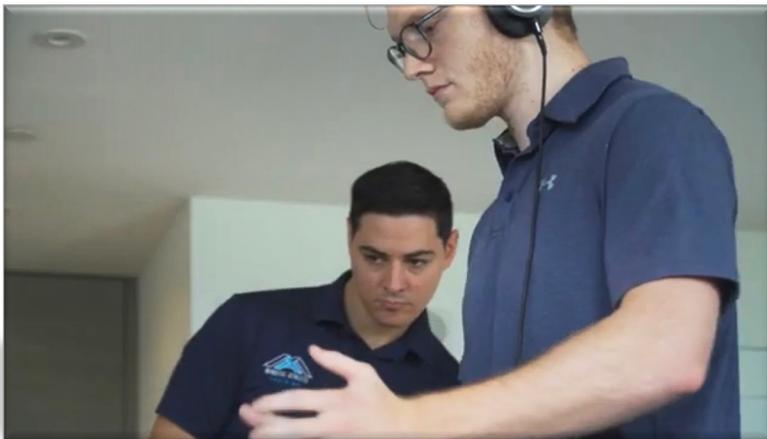


and defense, quickly shifting her stride, pace, and body position to meet demands. With the high amount of pressure her position demands, composure on the ball is essential, and Maddy is the first to say how helpful training HRV on Calm was in making her comfortable in slowing down and keeping her composure while dribbling.

As Maddy progressed in her training, she took a great liking to Fitlight, which she is pictured training with above. Fitlights are wireless light sensors that can be programmed to blink in a specific or random sequence. We use Fitlights for many different purposes, from sensory perception training to increasing processing speed to improving reaction time. They are a big part of adding a new challenge to many exercises and can significantly help improve performance. When Maddy began training with these in our performance lab and concurrently challenged herself to beat the performances of some other athletes, her mental fitness journey really took flight. In addition to utilizing the emotion regulation and relaxation techniques learned using Calm, Maddy began to challenge herself and stretch her brain to complete tasks with increasing speed, accuracy, and attentional shifts. She grew to be one of our most skilled MAT athletes at only 14 years old.

Maddy took a few months off from our training in 2021 BUT is now back to continue elevating her game as she prepares to begin high school in fall 2022. We have loved working with Maddy throughout her mental fitness journey, and we are excited to see where her continued training takes her game.

## NON-TRADITIONAL TRAINING FOR NON-TRADITIONAL ATHLETES: WORKING WITH GAMERS



**By Taylor Golkin**

In this month's edition, you saw how some of the highest performers are the ones who have embraced the most chaos, got to see a sneak peek spotlight of what a typical Mindful Athlete experience may look like, and got an in-depth look

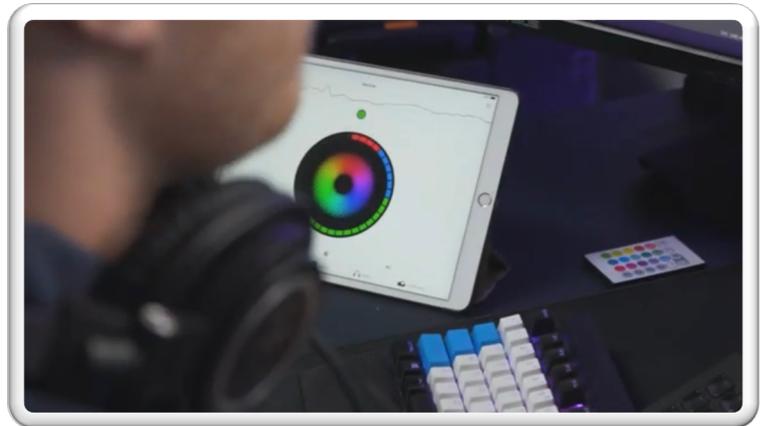
at our Daily Climbs. What takes MAT to the next level is our ability and

dedication towards improving all individual's, even non-traditional, adaptability and readiness to approach chaos both mentally and physically.

Esport and traditional athletes focus on many of the same core concepts and skills. Both are driven in competition, require a high level of skill, and experience costly physical and mental exertion.

MAT utilizes our lab not only for traditional sports, soccer, football, baseball, tennis, etc., but also to improve the emotional flexibility, physical and mental strength, and adaptation to chaos and stress for Esports athletes. Many people underappreciate the emotions that can go into gaming. For example, think about your own gaming experiences. Can you remember the adrenaline rush when faced with a chaotic or stressful situation? Or the anger that may have consumed you when "failing" or not making it to the next level? Or, if you are not a gamer, can you think of any experience that has given you similar reactions? Perhaps a presentation? Working out in the gym? Your job performance?

Most esports gamers go professional on average between the ages of 16-18 and retire by 25. In terms of development, we can think of this time frame as a period of emotional flexibility and processing maturation, impulse control and emotion-regulation development, and increased amygdala/stress responses. This emotion regulation is key and critical in optimal performance. Emotion regulation is the ability to use different self-regulation strategies as needed in changing environments. Some regulation strategies include reframing thinking patterns, challenging negative or troubling interpretations, positive perspective-taking, identifying and managing triggers for stress, and encouraging self-talk. It is essential to apply these strategies in high-stress situations, jobs, and environments to prevent or manage stress, burnout, negative thinking, and an array of other mental health concerns. It is important to note that most people are just beginning to develop and nurture these skills in the same time frame most Esport athletes are competing, putting them at a disadvantage with constant exposure to high stress.



As most Esport athletes are within the adolescent developmental period crucial for emotional processing and regulation, we utilize the biofeedback technology

in our lab to help them identify triggers to stress, depression, anxiety, anger, and any other concerns surrounding their performance. Once we identify the stressors, we can teach coping strategies and then train the athletes to manage the more challenging aspects of their sport. Additionally, similar to our work with traditional athletes, our coaches work with Esport athletes to improve their mental and physical game by reducing the effects of mental fatigue using the biosensor technology mentioned above.

For example, if an Esport athlete struggles to cope with anger throughout her performance, it will decrease performance. Over time this may lead her towards resenting gaming and increasing her levels of mental fatigue. MAT would support this athlete by bringing her into our lab and visually showing her what her stress response looks like in real-time. By seeing this change in physiology, she can become more empowered to understand what the change does to her performance. As her awareness and understanding grow, she would be trained on how to implement emotion regulation skills that she can use when experiencing a trigger, improving her gaming experience and heightening her level of play. Ultimately, our Esport athletes are able to be more calm, focused, and engaged while playing, which enhances their performance in both the virtual and real world.

## THE DESCENT

### THE MAT TEAM

Thank you for reading! Next month we will continue to detail applications of our work, discuss more real-world examples, and much more. We hope you are having a fantastic start to 2022, and remember, embrace your chaos! Make this your year!



**MINDFUL ATHLETE<sup>®</sup>**

**T R A I N I N G**