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## MINDFULNESS AND PERFORMANCE

Incorporating the theoretical conceptualizations of Jon Kabat-Zinn and Ellen Langer, this volume illustrates how performers from a variety of disciplines – including sport, dance, and music – can use mindfulness to achieve peak performance and improve personal well-being. Leading scholars in the field present cutting-edge research and outline their unique approaches to mindfulness that are supported by both theory and practice. They provide an overview of current mindfulness-based manuals and intervention approaches used around the globe in countries such as the United States, China, and Australia, exploring their effectiveness across cultures. *Mindfulness and Performance* will be a beneficial reference for practitioners, social and sport psychologists, coaches, athletes, teachers, and students.

AMY L. BALTZELL is Clinical Associate Professor of Counseling and Applied Human Development at Boston University, where she directs graduate training in sport psychology. Her publications include *Living in the Sweet Spot: Preparing for Performance in Sport and Life* and *Whose Game Is It, Anyway? A Guide to Helping Your Child Get the Most from Sports, Organized by Age and Stage* (with Richard D. Ginsburg and Stephen Durant).

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# MINDFULNESS AND PERFORMANCE

EDITED BY  
AMY L. BALTZELL  
*Boston University*



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*I dedicate this book to my three children,  
Shayna Daisy, Luke Henry, and Zoey Violet.*

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In the end, just three things matter:  
How well we have lived  
How well we have loved  
How well we have learned to let go  
— Jack Kornfield

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## *Preface*

I have been a sport psychologist for the past fifteen years – primarily running a graduate training program in sport psychology at Boston University and working with athletes, teams, coaches, and musicians in private practice. I became interested in mindfulness about ten years ago, when I began teaching courses in positive psychology. Gratefully, I had the opportunity to bring Joshua Summers into the classroom to teach my students (and me) about mindfulness and mindfulness mediation. I quickly began to understand that the concept of mindfulness had a depth and offered great potential for helping one to become more fully alive and optimize performance, if the individual could learn to cultivate a mindful approach to living and performance. The challenge, of course, is learning how to cultivate a mindful approach in one's own life and then learning how to bring the approach to others.

Parallel to my teaching, I began to realize that the athletes and musicians who came to me for help were often wrestling with debilitating performance anxiety. I turned to the traditional cognitive behavioral interventions offered by the field of sport psychology. Sometimes these strategies worked for my clients – I would help them create phrases to bring to mind in the predictably most difficult sport moments (being behind in a close game or losing a foot race or boat race by inches and still needing to concentrate on task relevant cues). Or I would help them create imagery scripts of coping with difficulty and, at once, creating an optimal performance experience. Yet, for some athletes, such strategies came up woefully short. And I had nothing to offer but my instincts cultivated from my own experience as an Olympian (rowing) and professional athlete (sailing).

However, I began to realize that it was not just my own experience facing intense anxiety as an elite athlete that was helping me help my clients. I began to realize that what I was doing with them was precisely this: I was helping them learn to cultivate a mindful approach to their competitive performance life. Instead of turning away from fear, I offered

my clients strategies and support to tolerate such thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations. I began to see radical change in my clients' internal experience and ability to perform under pressure. I had athletes who would pass out from fear on the field, could not swing a tennis racquet, or were unable to complete a track and field race. With a mindfulness approach, these issues were surprisingly and quickly resolved. At this time, I also began to conduct research on mindfulness in performance. From my own research, I was seeing, firsthand, athletes learning to have a changed relationship to pre-performance anxiety, mistakes on the field, and general debilitating comparisons to others (particularly for the higher-level, elite athlete). As I immersed myself in the mindfulness literature and research, I soon began to realize that we are just at the beginning of this journey of understanding how mindfulness practices help performance (or do not) and how best to cultivate such (beneficial) mindfulness practices.

An edited book on mindfulness and performance became a dream – to bring together top thinkers and practitioners. Through serendipity, good luck, and the courage to ask, we have been given this extraordinary opportunity by Cambridge University Press to compile this volume. I had the courage to create an A-list of contributing authors, and as you can see from the table of contents, they all joined the project. I could not be more grateful and delighted. I see this book as a place for top researchers, theorists, and top applied practitioners in the field to share their most current thinking within the arena of mindfulness and performance. I consistently experience a deep gratitude to each of you for sharing your ideas and work. The ultimate goal is to bring mindfulness approaches in a wise and productive way to a wide range of performers – from athletes, musicians, and dancers to underserved youth. Although there is still much to be done, this book is an amazing compilation of what we currently know, and together we offer ideas about the next steps in how to best practice mindfulness and what needs further empirical consideration.

With much love and appreciation,  
AMY BALTZELL



## *Acknowledgments*

I would like to thank so many people for their support, encouragement, and inspiration. Thank you to all of the chapter authors; you have so generously shared your cutting-edge ideas as researchers and practitioners. I created my A-list of the chapter authors I hoped to secure, and you all agreed. This compilation of chapters is truly extraordinary due to your willingness to join the project and share your expertise from around the world. Thank you to my three children – Shayna Daisy, Luke Henry, and Zoey Violet – for their patience throughout the many early mornings, afternoons, evenings, and weekends when I needed to spend “just a little more time” on this manuscript. Thank you to my many athlete clients who allowed me to share with them a new way of working, of allowing me to support them in cultivating a mindful approach to their own sport and music performance. Thank you, John McCarthy; you have always supported me and encouraged me to follow my heart and do the work that intersects with my skills, passion and aspiration to help others. Thank you to my students at Boston University, who have challenged me and helped me think through these new ideas within the realm of mindfulness and performance. Thank you to my research assistant Trevor Cote; your devoted, tireless, passionate engagement with this manuscript was inspiring and incredibly helpful. Thank you, Dr. Cathy O’Connor, my mentor; you support and challenge me to do the very best that I can, in all instances. And thank you to my best friend Bronwyn Malicoat, who is consistently interested, loving and encouraging in both my best and worst of moments. And, finally, thank you to Cambridge University Press, and in particular David Repetto, for this incredible opportunity.