

# Qualitative Study & Our Findings

## What we did:

x5 interviews with professional and college athletes

## Area of Interest

# Perceptions of Mental Strength Training

## Insight

Athletes view mental strength training as a crucial element of their overall performance, recognising it as essential for enhancing resilience, focus, and confidence.

However, not everyone knew what 'mental strength training' was by definition but were either actively engaging with it or had some sort of definition that resonated with its meaning.

## Theme

The important role of mental strength training underscores the necessity for a dedicated focus on mental health within the athletic community, revealing that this often-overlooked aspect has a significant impact on performance.

## Similarities

Athletes consistently agree on the fundamental importance of mental strength training in their development, acknowledging its contribution to maintaining focus and managing challenges within competitive sports.

## Differences

While all athletes value mental strength training, perceptions differ based on personal experiences; some saw it as optional until faced with adversity, while others have actively engaged in mental training throughout their careers.

## Value Proposition

Validates the value and need of MST whilst also illuminates the need for education to help athletes understand its importance and also how you go about doing MST.

## Area of Interest

# Cultural Barriers to Addressing MST

## Insight

There is a cultural expectation in sports that pressures athletes to "toughen up," hindering open discussions about MST. However, there is also a growing willingness to engage in MST resources among athletes.

## Theme

Overcoming stigma is key to enabling athletes to seek mindset and strength training support.

## Similarities

All athletes recognise cultural norms that inhibit open dialogue about mental strength training.

## Differences

Some feel more constrained by these expectations than others, with differing levels of readiness to seek help.

## Value Proposition

A platform that emphasises mental strength as an asset (resilience, winning mentality etc) can help reshape perceptions and create a safe environment for athletes to discuss their feelings and thoughts more openly, thus encouraging proactive engagement.

## Area of Interest

# Integrated Approaches to Training & Game-Days

## Insight

Athletes express a need for personalised tools that combine mental and physical training seamlessly.

## Theme

A personalised holistic approach is essential for optimal performance.

## Similarities

All athletes express a desire for more integrated MST resources that suit their immediate needs and schedules.

## Differences

Individual experiences with current apps vary (ie. Headspace), highlighting specific gaps in mental strength training support and MST retention.

## Value Proposition

Developing a platform that integrates mental strength training amongst their physical training and game-day preparation can empower athletes to manage both aspects of their performance more effectively. This could come in the form of personalised plans and integrated scheduling to help users determine what days to complete their desired or required tasks, game-day reflections and check-ins.

## Area of Interest

# Personalised Preparation Routines

## Insight

Individual training and pre-game rituals significantly enhance mental readiness and enables athletes to get into 'performance mode'.

## Theme

Customisable routines are crucial for effective preparation. Considering the varied needs across sports and the various areas of mental strength training some athletes need support in, this reflects a necessity for personalisation.

## Similarities

Athletes have personalised routines that include both physical and mental elements.

## Differences

The focus of rituals can vary, with some emphasising social connections and others prioritising individual techniques (listening to music, resting and video inspiration).

## Value Proposition

Offer customisable features and capabilities for training and pre-game routines can help athletes tailor their mental preparation, improving focus and confidence.

Implementing a "transition space" feature in the app that offers pre-game mental exercises and motivational content can assist athletes in effectively preparing for performance.

## Area of Interest

# Post-Game Reflection Tools

## Insight

The way athletes process and reflect on their performances can significantly influence their growth and development.

## Theme

Tools that facilitate structured post-game reflection, tailored to manage emotions after wins and losses, can help athletes constructively navigate their experiences, reinforcing a growth mindset.

## Similarities

All athletes recognise the importance of reflection in their development.

## Differences

Different emotional and activity approaches are taken when processing wins and losses, whether that's discussing further with team-mates, taking notes or internalising focus areas to work on and take into training the following week.

## Value Proposition

Tools facilitating structured post-game reflection can help athletes manage their emotions and maintain motivation, leading to a continuous improvement cycle.



## Area of Interest

# The Power of Visualisation Techniques

## Insight

Visualisation techniques are valuable tools for athletes, aiding in maintaining focus and motivation during training and pre-game preparation and enabling clearer post-game reflection.

## Theme

Incorporating guided visualisation exercises into training routines can enhance mental preparedness and confidence.

## Similarities

All athletes utilise visualisation as part of their mental preparation strategy.

## Differences

The application of visualisation varies among athletes, with some focusing on specific scenarios while others employ broader mental conditioning techniques. Maalik & Bruno in particular liked to avoid visualisation as a post-game reflection technique but acknowledged it was unavoidable

## Value Proposition

Providing guided visualisation exercises within the platform can strengthen athletes' mental readiness and improve competitive performance.

## Area of Interest

# Goal Setting and Performance Tracking

## Insight

Goal setting is a fundamental component of athlete motivation and development, enabling focus and effective tracking of improvements.

## Theme

Integrating goal-setting tools with performance tracking can significantly enhance an athlete's focus and accountability.

## Similarities

Athletes agree on the significance of goal setting in driving their motivation and effort.

## Differences

Some may focus more on individual performance goals, while others incorporate team objectives and feedback into their goal-setting framework.

## Value Proposition

Integrating goal-setting functionalities with performance reflection and metrics can reinforce a growth mindset among athletes and their team mates which in turn can encourage continuous individual and team improvement.



## Area of Interest

# The Role of Team Support and Anonymity

## Insight

Support from teammates is invaluable, yet there remains a level of discomfort in open discussions about mindset needs within teams.

## Theme

Providing a platform that allows for anonymous sharing can create a safer environment for athletes to express their challenges and seek support.

## Similarities

All athletes emphasise the importance of team support for maintaining and growing a consistent mindset.

## Differences

The extent of openness about mental strength issues varies among athletes, with some feeling more comfortable discussing their mental challenges than others.

## Value Proposition

A platform that allows for anonymous sharing can create a safe environment for athletes to discuss MST concerns and seek support, enhancing team cohesion and understanding.

## Area of Interest

# Community Support and Shared Experiences

## Insight

Connecting with peers who share similar challenges fosters solidarity and reduces feelings of isolation among athletes.

## Theme

Shared experiences can enhance support networks, providing critical emotional backing during difficult times.

## Similarities

Athletes express the strong value of community support for maintaining a strong mindset.

## Differences

The means of connecting and sharing experiences vary significantly, from structured support groups (film) to informal conversations (post game team reflection, socialising with the team etc)

## Value Proposition

Features that facilitate shared discussions or community forums can build camaraderie among athletes, fostering mutual support and resilience. Not to mention a lot of the experiences athletes have can be shared across team to individual sports.

## Area of Interest

# Self-Compassion and Resilience

## Insight

Athletes frequently confront self-doubt during trying performances (form) and injury recovery, making self-compassion essential for mental strength and resilience.

## Theme

Training modules and features focused on self-compassion can assist athletes in effectively managing perceptions on performance as well as injury recovery so they can reintegrate into a team more effectively and efficiently.

## Similarities

All athletes acknowledge the vital role of self-compassion in navigating the emotional impacts from certain challenges.

## Differences

Athletes vary in how proactively they practice self-compassion, with some focusing more on emotional support than others.

## Value Proposition

Integrating self-compassion training modules or features into the platform can support athletes in coping with challenges with form, injury and performance anxiety, facilitating their mental and physical recovery and growth.

## Area of Interest

# Habit Formation and Consistency

## Insight

Maintaining consistency in mental training routines can be challenging for athletes due to competing demands and fluctuating motivation.

## Theme

Tools that promote habit formation are crucial for maintaining regular engagement in mental training.

## Similarities

All athletes emphasise the importance of team support for maintaining and growing a consistent mindset.

## Differences

Specific recommendations for maintaining routines vary, with some suggesting technology-based reminders while others call for accountability practices within teams.

## Value Proposition

A system that supports habit formation through reminders, tracking, and milestone achievements can increase adherence to mental training routines, consequently enhancing overall athlete performance.

## Area of Interest

# Demanding Training Schedule and Mental Resilience

## Insight

The demanding nature of athletic training underscores the need for mental resilience to sustain focus and performance over time.

## Theme

Building mental stamina is critical for athletes facing rigorous training regimens and schedules.

## Similarities

All athletes acknowledge the necessity of mental resilience for maintaining performance amid pressures.

## Differences

Perspectives on managing stress and the associated demands can vary, influenced by personal experiences and coping strategies.

## Value Proposition

Developing resilience-building modules and features that align with training schedules can enhance athletes' capacity to cope with the challenges of their sport, ensuring they remain mentally strong and focused throughout.

## Area of Interest

# Coping Mechanisms for Stress Management

## Insight

Effective coping strategies are essential for athletes to manage stress and maintain composure during competitions.

## Theme

Quick-access tools for stress management are vital for self-regulation in high-pressure situations.

## Similarities

All athletes emphasise the necessity of coping mechanisms for dealing with stress and maintaining focus during competitions.

## Differences

The specific coping strategies vary, with some preferring physical techniques, while others lean towards cognitive re-framing and mental practices.

## Value Proposition

Providing and emphasising coping tools, such as breathing exercises and cognitive re-framing techniques around game-day, can enhance athletes' abilities to self-regulate during critical moments.



## Area of Interest

# Gamification and Retaining Attention

## Insight

Maintaining MST as a routine is difficult and therefore it is important to be reminded if done meaningfully.

## Theme

Gamification was seen as a possible means to help athletes stay on top of their MST routines, however it is the manner of how this is presented and communicated that determines whether this would be a success.

## Similarities

All athletes (whom we discussed this with) acknowledged reminders and affirmations as a meaningful way to keep them engaged, however they did say it would need to be mature and serious in nature for it to not trivialise their MST.

## Differences

Some thought having too much gamification was more noise and a hindrance rather than a form of support.

## Value Proposition

Having a lite form of gamification within a platform will help support athletes through their MST journeys whilst taking them seriously and not putting too much emphasis on succeeding at completing tasks.

## Other areas of interest...

### No-Desire For Tracking Data

Most athletes said they don't really use any apps on their phone outside of observing their calendars and talking in-app with team mates (TeamWorks). They don't review tracking via catapult or the like.

### Catapult & Performance Metric Management

Tracking and performance data is mostly managed and reviewed by coaching staff and management. Most of the meaningful reflection for Athletes occurs during 'film'.

### Quick, easy and too the point.

Some of the respondents said if they were to adopt a MST app and fit it into their weekly training and game-day schedule, they would need the content to be quick and easy to engage and complete whilst still being meaningful.

### Social Media & Distraction

A lot of athletes acknowledged that the main distraction outside of their busy schedules was sitting on their phone and rummaging through 'reels'. They seemed to respond to this format of content.

### Team Communication

Most athletes expressed that their immediate friend groups were also their teammates. They also said they would communicate with them via group chat on SnapChat, Instagram and WhatsApp.

## To summarise...

We can see there is an opportunity to integrate MST into the rigorous and structured lives of young athletes that can in turn help to create routine whilst also supporting athletes through trying times or maintain mindsets for performance. These include:

### Normalise Mental Training Discussions

Create a supportive environment where athletes can engage in open dialogue about MST, leveraging the perceived value of mental strength training as a critical component of athletic success.

### Personalised Solutions & Support

Customise the platform to include tailored routines, goal-setting tools, and reflection capabilities that cater to individual athlete needs.

### Integrate MST amongst Physical Performances

Develop a platform that seamlessly merges MST resources and content with physical training and game-days to promote a holistic approach to athlete performance.

### MST Education and Importance

Provide education modules or introductions that help athletes understand the importance of MST and how it can lift their game or help them solve a problem.

### Habit Formation and Engagement

Introduce consistent engagement mechanics, such as reminders, tracking, affirmations and progress bars that encourage athletes to integrate mental training into their busy everyday lives.

### Sport is Naturally Habit Forming

All athletes had a strong relation to habit and routine to help prepare them for training and game-days, showing there is opportunity to embed MST into their lives.

### Community and Anonymity

Establish features that facilitate anonymous sharing and support within communities to help athletes feel safe discussing their MST.

### Lite Gamification

Gamification is a solution to help athletes stay on top of their MST in their busy lives. However, the language, regularity and manner of how this is mobilised needs to be delicate and avoid condescension and frivolity.