

What Anxiety Disorders Do You See with Young Athletes Today & How to Fix?

Derek Mayson Interview 2021-03-22

Joey Myers 00:06

Hello, and welcome to the Swing Smarter Monthly Newsletter. This is your host, Joey Myers from hittingperformancelab.com.

Joey Myers 00:11

Today, this is actually our first-time meeting in person, Derek Mayson. Welcome to the show, first of all.

Derek Mayson 00:19

Thanks for having me, Joey. This is great. Looking forward to it

Joey Myers 00:22

You got it. I'm going to let him go into a little bit more on what he does, but Derek takes the mental side of the game. In particular, with these, our group we talked about hitting, and we'll be talking about the mental side of hitting in this program.

Joey Myers 00:39

What's interesting about Derek is he's our northern ally up in Canada. Anytime we can promote Canadians and get Canadians out there, showed up on the complete sports podcast, Darren runs that, he's a Canadian, fellow Canadian. It's kind of cool.

Joey Myers 00:55

We had a little conversation, hour and a half, and talked a lot about some of the challenges with getting more Canadians recruited in playing Major League Baseball and things like that, like Justin Morneau, Larry Walker, and some of the very big ones out there. Anytime we can promote Canada, we'd love to do it.

Joey Myers 01:17

First question, Derek. Just give us a little bit of a background from where you started. You have a great story. Go ahead and just give us that elevator pitch there.

Give us a Little Background from where you Started – you have a Great Story...

Derek Mayson 01:31

I'm from North Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. I've grown up playing fastpitch softball, actually, pretty unique. These days, the men's game has dwindled off and don't see a lot of male participants in the sport anymore, but it still has an international competition.

Derek Mayson 01:57

I grew up playing fast pitch from five years old, sprinkled a little bit of baseball in there, but that's really been my focus. Growing up here playing on provincial teams, first got noticed into the national team conversation around the age of 19 or 20 and made my debut with Team Canada at a Pan American championship in Mexico in 2006.

Derek Mayson 02:22

I've been with the national team program since then, I've played in four World Championships, I've won a gold medal at Worlds and three bronze, also won the Pan Am Games in 2015.

Derek Mayson 02:35

I've been really fortunate to play at the highest level of competition in our sports and travel the world playing in Australia and New Zealand couple of winters down there. As well as done some coaching with the Team Canada women's Olympic team prior to the Beijing Olympics of 2008.

Derek Mayson 02:56

As I said my international career started around 2006-2009 was my first world, leading into that, just having some uncertainty in my life coming back from some travel after finishing my university degree.

Derek Mayson 03:10

I started to experience an anxiety disorder which really you know, kind of rocked my life but as well in tandem with that my performance on the field. I feel like I didn't bring my best self to that 2009 Worlds which was my first debut at an international major event like that.

Derek Mayson 03:33

From there brought my play down, brought my quality of life down to the point where for the 2013 Worlds, I was cut from that team, that was the first time I'd ever been cut from a ball team in my life and kind of faced the Crossroads where I had to consider. I was 28-29 at the time, happy with having played at Worlds and kind of move on or am I going to sink my teeth into this and figure it out and get my game back, get my mental strength, mental capacity back essentially.

Derek Mayson 04:11

I chose the latter fortunately, I continued to educate myself with quality coaching and counseling on that side. I really sunk my teeth into different areas around the psychology of sports and of life.

Derek Mayson 04:27

Learning about sports psychology, dedicating myself to mindfulness meditation practice and for me as a jock coming up, when it was first introduced to me, it was like wow, this is like for monks in the Himalayas or dudes wearing robes off in the Alps or something like that, this is not me.

Derek Mayson 04:48

But I read Phil Jackson's book 11 Rings, and he spoke a lot about how we brought the Zen tradition but more so just it's a focused practice to the Bulls then to the Lakers of the 90s and early 2000s. Being an athlete, I really connected with that.

Derek Mayson 05:07

Follow that up by reading George Mumford book, The Mindful Athlete. Again, just seeing how to see the mind from a different perspective and better understand what it's doing, why it's doing, especially when you're struggling, when you're facing all sorts of challenging thoughts or tense feelings and stuff like that, how to navigate through that and rather than fight against it, but work through it, and be able to put it aside and focus exactly in that moment where you need to be.

Derek Mayson 05:42

I got back on the team in 2014, my play much improved, regain my starting spot for 2015 for the World Championship win, and the Pan Am Games win. Since then, I played in two Worlds, I've continued to broaden my knowledge in this area.

Derek Mayson 06:01

I've always wanted to share this information with individuals or young athletes who are coming up in A, they may be experiencing similar challenges, or B, they're just looking to get their game to that next level by strengthening their mental skills.

Derek Mayson 06:20

Rather than taking the one-to-one consulting approach, I've developed an online mental training program, which is a six week daily guided program for athletes and coaches to follow, which follows the path of short, two-to-four-minute audio lessons with some video lessons mixed in and some exercises each day to start by just better understanding how the mind works.

Derek Mayson 06:50

Introducing some of those focus practices that it's just like learning any other skill where we're trying to adjust our swing in a particular way, or learn to hit an off-speed pitch, we have to do repetition and work on drills and stuff like that.

Derek Mayson 07:05

These are skills, they can be taught, and they can be learned. Working through exercises in that sense, taking it from these practices outside of the game and bringing them onto the field, and how we can incorporate those into building more presence and focus into our game.

Derek Mayson 07:27

Looking at how to deal with those challenging thoughts and thought patterns that creep up for all of us. Sometimes they just take up too much real estate in your head and inhibits our ability to focus.

Derek Mayson 07:38

Looking at some common obstacles like fear of failure, fear of what others are thinking, how do we approach being in a slump, and how can we work our way through that mentally to get through successfully.

Derek Mayson 07:52

It's been a passion of mine to talk about this, to teach others and getting some great traction in both the baseball and fastpitch side of things, it's a unique opportunity for an individual to go through, but also, I'm getting a lot of teams. It's a cool team bonding experience that they can collaborate for.

Joey Myers 08:15

Cool, you shared a lot of info, and we'll deep dive into some of that. I love that. I wanted to start with, if you don't mind me asking, you mentioned anxiety disorder. I know you were going through if you don't mind, I understand if you don't, but I'm sure there's plenty out there, like you said that are probably dealing with the same thing.

Joey Myers 08:36

If you can go into maybe a little bit more detail what that was for you. Do you see some of the challenges, maybe the top two, when it comes to those different anxiety disorders, thank you to the 2020 stuff. Maybe what you had to deal with, a little bit more in depth, and maybe how you got out of that, what was the aha moment? Maybe what you see the top two things from 2020 that are going to come up.

What Anxiety Disorders do you see with Young Athletes Today and How to Fix?

Derek Mayson 09:05

As far as my experience with it, it's kind of different for a lot of individuals who experience this, and unfortunately, they say this is the most anxious generation to date.

Derek Mayson 09:20

For me, I had some insomnia troubles, which goes without saying is going to affect your performance as far as being sharp and just where your mind is. Overall, with that, the line of thinking that I was under, it was creating a lot of tension in my body.

Derek Mayson 09:45

Definitely didn't have that relaxation feel to be able to come onto the field and just let it flow. A lot of worry type thinking that was quite pervasive. I think the biggest thing that I realized over time was fighting against those types of feelings and those thoughts.

Derek Mayson 10:09

What I mean by that is, for any individual, if you just pause, and it's quiet and just try and listen to sounds for a second, within about half a second, one or two seconds, thoughts just going to pop into your head, whether it's what you got to do next, maybe it's something silly.

Derek Mayson 10:30

Or if your mind is stuck in this habit of negative pervasive thoughts, they may be something that's self-critical or judging against yourself. The realization that these thoughts that just pop into our heads, we don't really have any control over that, they're called automatic thoughts.

Derek Mayson 10:51

When they're negative, they called automatic negative thoughts or ANTs for short. So, the realization that I don't have any control over this, if I'm beating myself up over these thoughts popping into my head, or from my body feeling tense for a particular reason, I'm really just kind of adding to the tension and angst within my mind or within my body.

Derek Mayson 11:16

By understanding that those are automatic, it's based off of however my previous experiences, or maybe some hardships I've undergone in previous years. If I don't fight those, and don't give my mind the trigger that is saying, "That's bad, I need to fight against that", essentially the mind is saying, "Oh, you gave me some attention, I'll send some more of those types of thoughts".

Derek Mayson 11:47

If we kind of just notice it, and let it go, over time, the mind figures out that okay, maybe these aren't very useful tight thoughts, I don't need to keep sending thought that what if I strike out, everyone's going to laugh at me, or who's in the stands, or the scouts in the crowd or anything like that, whereby we can let those go and stop fighting against those.

Derek Mayson 12:12

The other thing is learning how to become present on the field. When I was first introduced to mental training, when it comes to sport, it was often said, you got to be fully present, you got to be fully present on the field. I kind of took that to be, Okay, well the game is two or three hours long, I got to be focused for two or three hours.

Derek Mayson 12:35

That's just not how the mind is made. The mind is made to focus in short stints and then wander off. We just learn to notice that, and then bring it back gently, and wanders, it comes back, wanders, come back.

Derek Mayson 12:48

To understand A, why the mind does that, but also B, how do we bring it back? We can do that by utilizing our senses. If that's on the field, rather than thinking about the ball, we throw away two innings ago, we can notice that our mind has gone off there, and I can reconnect with my breath, I can reconnect with the feeling of the dirt under my cleats, connecting with our senses, they are inherently present.

Derek Mayson 13:15

You can't hear something 10 minutes ago; you can't taste something two days from now. They happen right now. By connecting with those senses, you're able to bring yourself back to the present moment. It's better to just let go of those challenging thoughts.

Joey Myers 13:32

Very cool. I love that. That was one thing, I was at headspace, the headspace app, and I did that for a couple years and learned that whole idea of you don't fight the thought even when it's negative. The natural tendency is to say that's ridiculous, that's not true.

Joey Myers 13:51

Like you said, it's almost like the mind goes, Oh, there's some attention, let's do more of that. I have a hitter, I have a young online hitter right now, fairly young, and he is a hard worker. For his age, he's got a black belt, I think it's in Taekwondo, which is pretty impressive.

Joey Myers 14:09

But the swing, he seems to be having a hard time, he's putting a lot of pressure on himself to the next month, I better do well or else I'm going to quit. He puts his work in, he's working half hour a day.

Joey Myers 14:24

I usually recommend to my hitters at least five minutes a day, four days a week. I don't say thousands of swings and all that kind of stuff. You know how it is with some players, they shut off. They're like I'm not doing that, and we try and start short.

Joey Myers 14:37

This player is on the other side of the spectrum where I have to almost tell him to take days off. For his age it's pretty crazy. He puts a lot of pressure on himself. What's your advice to a young player that is putting a lot of pressure on themselves and is almost given himself deadlines if this doesn't happen?

Joey Myers 14:54

We're talking about hitting here, hitting is a very challenging skill in probably, arguably, any sport, you could probably agree with me on that, maybe more so than pitching. What advice would you give him?

What's your advice to a young player that is putting a lot of pressure on themselves and is almost given himself deadlines if this doesn't happen?

Derek Mayson 15:09

When it comes to better understanding that belief system that he's working through. Essentially what his mind is telling him is, if I don't get this by next month or if I'm not the best, then what's the point? You kind of have to dig a little deeper into the thought patterns and understand where they're coming from, and potentially it is to that root belief of, I got to be the best or it's not even worth it.

Derek Mayson 15:43

We kind of peel back the layers of the onion, to get to that core belief that is coming through, and breaking that apart a little bit, almost how a lawyer would break it down very objectively.

Derek Mayson 16:00

Let's look at that, that belief of if I'm not the best, it's not even worth it. How many people are the best hitter in the world? There's only going to be one and there's a lot of other hitters in the world, too, it's very objective as to what is the best hitter in the world.

Derek Mayson 16:22

Breaking it down and being able to see that there's this belief that has built up, it's not necessarily true. Now, every time he sees a thought along those lines of, I must get it done by next month, he could step back and go--- you know what, that's not actually true. Just because my mind tells me that it doesn't mean it's true.

Derek Mayson 16:46

What we do in the program is work through developing some affirmations against that. Rather than letting the mind continue to tell you that I must get this done next month or there's no point, could create an affirmation in the opposite effect.

Derek Mayson 17:04

As far as I'm working hard, and I'm improving every day, and my skills are going to develop over time. Rather than having a strict schedule towards it, softening that approach, like we talked about a double-edged sword sometimes, where we need that drive, to push us, to put in the work, to practice. Otherwise, we're going to be on the couch and not working on your skills.

Derek Mayson 17:35

But the other side of that sword is pushing ourselves too hard, putting too much mental strain on. I think understanding that just because your mind tells you something, it doesn't mean it's true, that you can challenge that, and plug in some more affirmations that work more in your favor, as opposed to just going with whatever your mind tells you.

Joey Myers 18:03

I love that. Thank you, Derek, for that. On the opposite side, this particular hitter is, I don't want to call him an anomaly, because it's not like it's super rare, but there are hitters that work almost too hard. I was one of those.

Joey Myers 18:17

I learned throughout my career that I had to take time off. When I was really frustrated, or I was really just disappointed in my play, that I would skip out on the extra BP or I would come to the ballpark, I wouldn't come early like I would before to try and put some extra work in and I would take those breaks.

Joey Myers 18:33

How about the hitter on the other side, some of those parents out there, I get emails and when I put out surveys, they'll say the biggest frustration is actually getting their kid boy or girl to actually do the work. Inspirational side or motivational side, what's your advice for those parents working with those kiddos?

Contrarily, what is your advice to parents who have kiddos that don't have motivation or inspiration to practice?

Derek Mayson 18:58

Again, that is a tough one because usually when you see athletes who rise to the top of their group, their sport and that sort of thing, a lot of that is intrinsically motivated, they are the ones who want to go to practice. They are the ones who want to put in that work.

Derek Mayson 19:21

Especially when it comes to youth sports, I'm very much an advocate of focusing on the fun aspect of it, not focusing on what could be with college scholarships, or what could be with pros if you just listen to me. In that essence you can turn off a kid by pushing them too hard, if it's just not theirs, but by focusing more on the fun elements and letting them figure out what drives them to play the sport, that's going to be much longer lasting than just going about it in practice, because mom or dad told me to, or because it's a chore.

Derek Mayson 20:05

I think it must come from that joy of the sport and lessening that pressure, understanding that maybe they're avoiding doing extra work, because maybe there's some fear involved that they might not be living up to some expectations that we may or may not know that we're putting on the kid. Again, coming back to the fun and taking that pressure off that. Let it be their drive to do it.

Joey Myers 20:35

Great advice. I think that worked both ways from the hitter that's not as inspired and the hitter that's almost overly inspired. I think that fun element and relationship is a big thing. That's great advice.

Joey Myers 20:48

On the hitting side, you mentioned slumps. What's your advice when it comes to hitters that are in slumps? Like you said objective, it could be 0-for-30, it could be an 0-for-10 0-for five, it just means whatever slump is to the hitter, what are some of the things, maybe the top two things that you recommend that they do to help them transition out of it?

Derek Mayson 21:11

First thing is having that perspective, you talked about 0-for-30, 0-for-10, whatever it is, typically, in a season, you're going to have four to 700 at bats or something like that, it's a small segment of that entire season of your entire career.

Derek Mayson 21:32

You also probably have been through a slump previously, and it did come to an end. Sometimes when we're in slumps, we figure, there's no way out of this. But understanding that you're in it right now, forcing your way out of it isn't the way.

Derek Mayson 21:51

The other thing I like to think of is, when we think of bringing a slump with us to the plate, we're carrying that baggage of that 0-for-10 up to the plate. But when we're up there, we can't do anything about those previous at that, they've already happened.

Derek Mayson 22:08

Essentially, as much as we can, bring in that 0-0 mentality to the plate, that this is a brand-new opportunity, brand new approach. As much as we can bring that presence practice, onto the field.

Derek Mayson 22:23

What I mean by that is, the mind is going to revert back, you're going to be on deck going, it's going to save you, you're 0-for-10. You need to get ahead here, you got to bust out, we can notice that our mind is trying to do that, we don't have to necessarily just go with that.

Derek Mayson 22:40

Notice it, let go, get back into the feel of our swing, get back into the dirt feeling under our feet, get extremely present and break it down very individually, sense to sense, step to step, get into the box, and then break it down into what I call "what's real moment".

Derek Mayson 23:01

As opposed to thinking, three pitches ahead, and if he paints the outside corner with this, I got to be ready for a down and in, everything like that, breaking it down to what's real.

Derek Mayson 23:13

I'm standing here with a bat, the pitchers out there with a ball, and my best chance here is to rely on my natural abilities. And to just rely on your reaction and instinct, rather than thinking your way through that, rely on your instinct and just let your talents flow.

Joey Myers 23:31

That's great one. Yeah, relying on your instinct. Usually, because I was more of a thinker. It would usually get me in trouble. It was a blessing and a curse, right? Don't need to think ahead and do things ahead of the game, be ahead of the game.

Joey Myers 23:45

Especially in times of slumps, you tend to overthink and overanalyze. I used to look at some of my teammates who seemed to be like cavemen more than over thinkers. I used to just think, I wish I could be like Brian more, I wish I could think like him, when you have the attention span of a gnat, where something's in front of your face, and once it's gone, and you forget all about it. I wish, at some point, I could do that.

Joey Myers 24:10

I like how you gave that bit of advice. Before we get to a little bit more of what you're doing. I know you touched on that a little bit on your programming and stuff, and we'll ask you where people can find you.

Joey Myers 24:23

One of the one of the questions I had, when you talked about that you pretty much transitioned out of that anxiety of insomnia. You mentioned a few things, I think you mentioned meditation and trying to be more present in the moment.

Joey Myers 24:36

What were the one big thing or was it a few of those factors that helped you to break out of that? Was there one thing that really transitioned you out and some of the other things helped climb up that ladder? Or was it just a group of different things and what were they?

What was the one big thing or was it a few other factors that helped you to break out of your anxiety disorder?

Derek Mayson 24:53

I think the biggest thing for me and whether it's achieved through meditation, it was meditation, others it can be just a just a realization and more presence of mind of having that separation between mind and self.

Derek Mayson 25:14

There is a reason that headspace is called headspace, it's being able to see the mind doing what it does separate from myself. What I mean by that is, my mind may tell me that we haven't got to hit off this picture in six tries. I don't want to look like a fool today.

Derek Mayson 25:41

I know there's some scouts in the crowd, and the mind may be doing all this. Essentially, understanding why the mind is doing that, it's trying to protect us, it's trying to prepare, it goes way back to how the human brain has evolved over time to protect us and keep the species alive. It's always kind of looking out for us.

Derek Mayson 26:02

It will ping these thoughts and over time, if we give those thoughts a lot of attention, like we said, it's going to keep spiraling. To be able to understand that, it's just the mind trying to protect me, I can put that aside. Like we said, bring our presence to the field, and let her natural abilities flow as much as possible.

Derek Mayson 26:25

When I was having my hardest times, it was that overthinking state of getting into the box and trying to predict what the next pitch was, at the same time it's trying not to, whether it was built up in the mind of

don't embarrass yourself here or don't waste your at-bat because you're supposed to be this type of player.

Derek Mayson 26:53

Getting caught up in all those habitual thoughts, being able to separate from those, that's just the mind doing its thing. I don't have to buy into those, I can let go, and just be with what's here. It's me, I'm on a ball field, I got a bat, there's a pitcher with the ball. Let's do this.

Joey Myers 27:11

I love that. With my hitters we work mechanical stuff, and I tell them, there's certain things that we work with that you can bring to the field today. We talked about something like finger pressure, where it's just squeezing tight, but it's nothing like some of the other things we teach where it's a little bit more cognitive load, and tell them, when you get into the box, all you're thinking about is just competing.

Joey Myers 27:36

I think that's basically what you're saying--- work based off of instinct. You must trust the work that you put in outside of the box, and once you get in, like you said, it just you, you got a bat in your hand, you got a guy that's got a ball, and you're not even really paying attention, that's the other thing causes anxiety.

Joey Myers 27:50

You think, this guy, he's one of those above average velocity guys, and he's really good. He's being scouted. He's verbal to a big-time college school and all that. Like you said, it's that forward, that future thinking or we're bringing past in, and it's just become so heavy that it almost paralyzes you. Particularly good. Awesome.

Joey Myers 28:12

I want to be respectful of your time. You talked a little bit about what your product is and what you're doing. Explain just a little bit about what the product is and walk us through that, where we can find your website, any kind of social media, YouTube, all that kind of stuff.

Explain just a little bit about what the product is and walk us through that, where we can find your website, any kind of social media, YouTube, all that kind of stuff?

Derek Mayson 28:35

The program is called the Locked In Mental Training Program, it can be found at lockedinmentaltraining.com. It's a six week daily guided online program that users access through whatever device, typically a mobile phone.

Derek Mayson 28:52

Each day, users will have a two-to-four-minute audio lesson, along with some daily guided exercises to run through each day, to reinforce the learnings. Rather than just kind of passively sitting back and

listening to something and thinking that it's going to be absorbed again, this is a skill that has to be practiced.

Derek Mayson 29:16

Each day, about 5-10 minutes of practice, which varies between some focus practice to bringing some more presence into your day. I like to talk about how the mind itself, we're not just training it to be a better ballplayer because we bring our mind everywhere, we go.

Derek Mayson 29:37

This training, it's training for life skills, better presences as an athlete, as students, as in your relationships or career, with those exercises, there's focused practices, some journal exercise, exercises to do to break down some of those thought patterns to better understand how to work through those challenging thoughts.

Derek Mayson 30:06

Over those six weeks, students often come back to me saying they have a much better attention to where their mind is at any time. As opposed to just writing off some of those more challenging thought patterns.

Derek Mayson 30:23

Coaches enjoy it, because we all know the mental game is a huge part of sports, but the hard part is how do we bring that in a program, in a guided process to athletes, a lot of times, we bring in a guest speaker or say, read this book. That's the end of it.

Derek Mayson 30:44

This is a guided day by day process that builds up through an understanding of how the mind works, and specific exercises that we can bring onto the field of play, to get us in that great mindset to be present and ready to compete.

Derek Mayson 31:01

Again, lockedinmentaltraining.com, you can find me on social @lockdownmentaltraining on Facebook, and Instagram, @DerekMayson on Twitter. I love to talk to some coaches or players out there about the mental game or we're setting it up for their team for a cool team bonding experience.

Joey Myers 31:25

Cool. Well, thank you for your time, Derek. And again, like I said, this is hitting the mental side of it, or just even playing in general. I love how you how you transition to that.

Joey Myers 31:37

It's not just baseball or softball that you're learning, but it's you're learning life through baseball and softball, and I'm all about that, and anybody that can put something together that's going to help both of those two things, and not just the baseball, softball, because someday that career will end, whether that's going to be after Little League or high school, college or professional or Olympics.

Joey Myers 31:59

At some point, that career is going to end, and you got to have those skills, you develop those skills to be able to apply to life, wherever that takes you. So, I appreciate your message, Derek, and I'll get everything together for you send that over and then you can do with it how you will, but thanks again for your time, brother.

Derek Mayson 32:16

Glad to, love what you're doing, Joey and let me know how you want to continue to connect in the future.

Joey Myers 32:23

You got it. Keep up the good work up there in our northern border.

Derek Mayson 32:28

You got it, I appreciate it.

Joey Myers 32:29