

A photograph of Michael Jordan in a red Chicago Bulls jersey, number 23, performing a dunk during a game. He is in mid-air, with his arms raised and the basketball in his hands. The background is a large, cheering crowd in a basketball arena. A scoreboard in the background shows the time 06:16. The text "How to Unlock the Mental Side of the Game" is overlaid in large, bold, white, italicized font across the top half of the image.

***How to Unlock
the Mental Side
of the Game***

AN EBOOK

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1. The Art of Practicing Balance

It took me so long to understand this concept. I was the type of guy that outworked everyone. Constantly in the gym. Constantly working on my craft. Constantly in the weight room. Constantly watching film. Constantly learning. Putting in more hours than EVERYONE, but still... struggled to see results. It frustrated the hell out of me watching all these kids around me *not* putting in the same number of hours, yet still somehow performing better than me. It made absolutely zero sense to me, until I learned the art of practicing balance.

Balance is the most important aspect, not only of your basketball game, but of your life, as well. The day my dad told me this, was the day my life changed forever. This is why balance is at the top of the list to help unlock the mental side of the game. It's what makes everything work. It connects all the dots. It allows the strings to be pulled. It's the foundation of our house. It's the pillar to the whitehouse. It's the brain to our body. Without it, everything comes crumbling down.

What is balance? Seems like a simple question, but practicing balance is what seven billion people struggle with each day. Balance, by definition on *Google*, is a condition in which different elements are equal or in the correct proportions. Now, how can this possibly relate to our basketball game or life? And how can we master it?

The first and most important concept to understand about practicing the art of balance is that it is different for EVERYONE. This was the crucial piece that I could not wrap my head around early on. One of the players that I always admired growing up was Kobe Bryant. I loved how he was always outworking everyone. No matter the time or day, every single day, he would grind until he couldn't, and would never let someone

else beat him to it. I craved that type of work ethic and image. He trained on average six hours a day. I wanted that. I wanted to train like Kobe. I wanted Kobe's work ethic. I wanted to be like Kobe. This was an honest and brutal mistake...

I am NOT Kobe. My body is NOT Kobe. My mind is NOT Kobe. My art of balance and Kobe's art of balance are COMPLETELY different. Balance for one player can be completely different to another. It's relative. There's no "end all be all" answer for what your balance is for a particular objective. This is a crucial piece to understand.

Now you are probably asking yourself, "How do I find the balance right for me?" It is actually easier than you think: experimentation and experience. The only way to determine the *right* balance for your game/life is to begin implementing balance yourself and consciously reflecting on the results transpiring. Are your skills not improving or possibly getting worse from the "x" number of hours you are putting in? Through experimentation, you may discover that "x" is too little time to put in to improve your skills and can be labeled as undertraining. Are you getting injured a lot, and/or have you seen a decrease in explosion with the number of "y" hours you have put in? Through experimentation, you may discover that "y" is too much time to put in to improve skills and can be labeled as overtraining.

Kobe's balance was training six hours a day. Realize that 99.9% of you are NOT going to have that type of balance for your training. Not even myself. I learned the hard way by trying to follow his training schedule. Training like Kobe, will not make you Kobe. Nothing will. Find YOUR balance and master it.

In every single situation of basketball, you can find a way to incorporate balance.
In every single situation of life, you can find a way to incorporate balance. Here are a few examples that come to mind from personal experience.

Examples:

- *Training:*
 - Undertraining:
 - Not putting in the hours necessary to better yourself
 - Poor work ethic
 - Lack of preparation
 - Lower confidence
 - Ultimately... worse performance
 - Overtraining: (What I struggle with even to this day)
 - Putting in TOO much work (Yes, this is possible!)
 - Not giving the body enough time to recover, leading to less and less explosion
 - Increase of injury
 - Ultimately... worse performance
 - Solution:
 - Find a training schedule that works for YOU.
 - Experiment between hours of training time and find your middle ground between over and under training.
 - Constantly reflect, always find ways to better innovate and plan your training. Do NOT copy others.

- *Recovery:*
 - Not enough recovery:
 - Decrease in explosion
 - Lower energy levels
 - Higher chance of injury, especially stress related
 - Slower muscle adaptation
 - Ultimately... Worse performance
 - Too much recovery:
 - Lack of preparation
 - Not enough skill work/ hours put in
 - Increased laziness and procrastination
 - Ultimately... worse performance
 - Solution:
 - Find recovery methods that work for YOU.
 - Experiment between training hours and how much time you give yourself to recover.
 - Think back to old injuries and why you got them.
 - Strategically plan your day with the correct amount of rest needed after reflection and experiment.
- *Flexibility:*
 - Under Flexibility:
 - High chance of muscles being pulled
 - Less explosion and mobility

- Discomfort throughout your day
 - Increase of injury
 - Ultimately... worse performance
- Hypermobility:
 - High chance of joint dislocation
 - Increase of clicking joints
 - Increase of injury
 - Ultimately... worse performance
- Solution:
 - Find mobility and flexibility exercises that work for YOU.
 - Experiment between exercises and find your middle ground between under mobility and hypermobility.
 - KNOW YOUR LIMITS!
- *Family:*
 - Too much family time:
 - Leads to annoyance between family members
 - Increases chance of conflict
 - Increases chance of grudges occurring
 - Ultimately... worse performance
 - Too little family time:
 - Loss of happiness
 - Increase in depression
 - Feelings of less support and stability

- Ultimately... worse performance
- Solution:
 - Spend as much time with your family as you can until you start to see an increase in arguments.
 - Family is truly the core of happiness and all of us can spend more time with them than we think, but there is a limit, just like there is with everything.
- *Friends/ Social Life:*
 - Never with friends:
 - More time to train (Which leads to overtraining)
 - Worsened mood
 - Bitter and angry person
 - Arrogance and narcissism
 - Ultimately... worse performance
 - Always with friends:
 - No time to train (Which leads to undertraining)
 - Lack of direction and purpose
 - Exposed to more alcohol and drugs
 - Increase in poor choices
 - Ultimately... worse performance
 - Solution:
 - Find the amount of time with friends that suits your mental state AND basketball game.

- Constantly reflect and record. Find your boundaries and stick to them.
- Use a schedule and make separate days for friends and training. This way, we don't let one bleed too much into the other.

- *Financial:*

- Not enough financial focus:
 - You don't have the chance to jump on as many opportunities
 - More stress
 - Less time to relax and enjoy yourself
 - No financial freedom
 - Ultimately... worse performance
- Too much financial focus:
 - Arrogance, fewer people want to be around you
 - You lose sight of what matters, FAMILY
 - Increase of choices that negatively affect those around you
 - Increase of narcissism
 - Ultimately... worse performance
- Solution:
 - Find the stage of financial freedom.
 - You shouldn't be in a place where you're stressing about paying the bills and making more money, but also not at the point where you're negatively affecting everyone around you because you only care about money.

- Multitudes of the super rich and famous are depressed, remember that!
- *Career:*
 - Not enjoying career enough:
 - Lack of purpose and self worth
 - Less income and financial freedom
 - Less enjoyment of everyday life
 - Ultimately... worse performance
 - Loving career too much:
 - Losing sight of what matters most, family
 - Less family time
 - Increase of too much greed as a focus
 - Loss of friends
 - Ultimately... worse performance
 - Solution:
 - Find a way to separate your work and personal life.
 - If you're working, it's only work.
 - If it's personal, it's only personal.
 - Don't mix the two together! Make a schedule.

These examples can be applied to every facet of life. To recap, the art of practicing balance is a variable. It differs from person to person. Balance is the key to a harmonious state of mind. The better mental state we are in as basketball players, the more likely we are to reach our maximum performance level.

What actions can we take to practice the art of balance?:

If you're the type of player to constantly be training, (like me), the best course of action is a two week break. I remember reading an article about how Steph Curry always takes a two week break after his NBA season is over, and I never understood it. How could the best shooter in the world afford to take time off and let others pass him? Why would I rest and let others pass me?

I later realized that without the physical AND mental break from basketball, you're going to experience burnout. Burnout is characterized by feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion. It increases our negative perception towards whatever we are doing, in this case, basketball. This two week break allows Curry to get into the right mental state towards basketball. As we all should know by now, the majority of our shots are mental! No wonder he is the best shooter in the world! If you're constantly doing basketball, plan to take a two week break to reset your mental state. Mental rest is just as important as physical rest.

Another action we can take to practice the art of balance is to record a daily short paragraph to reflect on your day and note how you performed in your seven wheels of life (see below). This will keep us in check and always in search of the middle ground in our core facets of life. Remember, a happy life makes a happy player. And a happy player is a damn good one!

The seven wheels of life (according to Dave Ramsey, radio host) to practice the art of balance:

1. Career
2. Financial

3. Spiritual
4. Physical
5. Intellectual
6. Family
7. Social

Every night, note three things you did well for each category and three things that you can improve upon. Understanding and practicing balance throughout my life was the turning point in my basketball career. I finally stopped worrying about why my hard work was not paying off, and I actually started to enjoy the process. Everything in my life improved tremendously. Improve YOUR life tremendously by taking the first step to unlocking the mental side of the game by practicing the art of balance today.

2. How to Unlock the “Zone” Whenever You Want

What is the “Zone”? Majority of you basketball players will understand this concept. Being in the “zone” or “flow state” defined by Headspace is, *“The sense of fluidity between your body and mind, where you are totally absorbed by and deeply focused on something, beyond the point of distraction. Time feels like it has slowed down. Your senses are heightened. You are at one with the task at hand, as action and awareness sync to create an effortless momentum. Some people describe this feeling as being “in the zone.” This is the flow state and it’s accessible to everyone, whether you’re engaged in a physical activity, a creative pursuit, or even a simple day-to-day task.”*

Meditation, visualization, and the breath, are the key to unlocking the zone or flow state whenever you please. Practicing these components have truly changed me, and helped me unlock the mental side of the game. If you are not aware of what Headspace is, it’s an online guided meditation organization. Organizations like this and *Calm*, are ones I highly recommend.

If you are not aware of what meditation is, it’s the ability to focus on only one thing for a certain period of time. Whatever that one type of focus is, we call it your homebase. Your homebased can be your breath. Your basketball could be your homebase. Your jump rope could be your homebase. Anything can be your homebase, as long as the homebase is the only thing you are focusing on.

You are now probably wondering how this could possibly transfer over to the game of basketball. A player’s game of basketball’s performance increases as thought decreases. When we are in the, “zone,” our thoughts are completely out of the equation

when we shoot the basketball. There are no distractions. It's just us and the ball. This type of focus is the same muscle in the brain we are training when we meditate. Bobby Knight once said, "Mental is too physical as 4 is too 1." So what's more important, a bicep curl for your brain? (Meditation) Or an actual bicep curl for our body? You can be the judge of that... I know what I'm picking. Start training your brain like we train our body.

Meditation allows me to go into what I like to call, "Autopilot," basically at will. Autopilot's definition in basketball terms is the unrecognition of whether a shot goes in or not. That's why I love to have shooting workouts with my students that are NOT designed by how many shots to make at each spot. Shooting workouts that only focus on makes can lead to bad body language. When we have to make a certain amount at each spot, we get more frustrated for misses.

Now, getting a certain number of shots to go through in a row is a different story. The purpose of trying to make shots in a row builds in game pressure. I agree with that principle. But, it's also great to have workouts where you're not recognizing makes OR misses. This helps us build that flow state. The ability to think about nothing. We will make more shots with our thoughts decreasing. The act of just doing, NOT thinking. This also helps build a more even keeled state, not getting too high, and not getting too low. Which leads into one of our later subjects essential to unlocking the mental side of the game: Composure.

I mentioned second that visualization is also necessary to unlock the zone at will. Visualization is the formation of a mental image of something. This can be in the past or the present. The awesome thing is, when we visualize, our brain can't tell the difference

between something that actually happened and something that hasn't actually happened. Crazy, right? So this means the more and more we visualize our success on the court, the more likely we are to actually perform better. Rinaldo is a famous professional athlete that swears by this practice. He visualizes the ENTIRE game before he actually plays it. Absolutely nuts. Every little detail. How the grass feels on his feet. How it feels to kick the soccer ball. The temperature. The wind. The crowd's reactions. Everything. Rinaldo mastered the art of visualization and tricked his brain into better performances. We can do the exact same thing. Visualize yourself going off. Visualize yourself not missing. Visualize yourself playing lockdown defense. I promise you, your performance will increase training this way. It's a mental bicep curl.

Breath is the final piece to the puzzle that can also drastically change our game by just conscious action. Yes, this is a giant part of meditation, but I also wanted to mention breathing in terms of a conditioning stand point. It's extremely hard to get in a zone when you're constantly gasping for breath. Have you ever wondered how Curry can run around so much every freaking night? It's not because he's always on a treadmill running countless miles, it's because he understands the power of the breath. Being able to consciously slow your breathing down, in and out through your nose, actually lowers our heart rate. Breathing through just our nose also allows for more oxygen to go to necessary muscle groups, instead of your lungs. (Which is what we want). By becoming a master of the breath, we now control our conditioning instead of conditioning controlling us.

How do we implement these new mental bicep curls into our daily life?:

I recommend meditation and visualization for about 20 minutes each after my AM workout. If that's too long, shorten it. Gradually progress your way up to 20 minutes. Getting these mental exercises done in the morning is extremely important. This sets a tone for the rest of our day. Lastly, whenever I do conditioning, I go as long as humanly possible to breathe through my nose only. Take your next step to unlocking the mental side of the game by training yourself to unlock the "zone" at will.

3. Composure and Why Perception IS Reality

At the time of writing this, Outer Banks is an extremely popular TV show throughout the young community. This is my favorite way of explaining perception to kids. So let's say for example I watch Outer Banks with my best buddy, Coach Aaron. We are both watching the same show. I love the show. Except, Coach Aaron hates Outer Banks. How can this be? We both watched the same thing? This is the definition of perception, and mastering control over it can be the crucial turning point to unlock the mental side of the game. Perception IS reality.

Whenever players are having an off game, they love to say two words, I CAN'T. I am sure some of yourselves reading this right might be saying to yourself that you actually do this a lot. It happens to all of us. Majority of rough games for basketball players normally go like this, "I can't make a shot today. I can't do anything against this defense. I can't make a layup. I can't dribble the ball today." These are only a few examples that I see from kids every single day. This is your opportunity to really take advantage of what the majority of people struggle with. Using "I can't," is a negative perception. This negative perception then leads to a negative reality. This perception is what leads so many of us to poor performances.

Lucky for us, we actually have control over our perception. 99% of people don't use it correctly, however. Mastering the art of frame flipping is crucial to any basketball player's success. What is frame flipping? This is the practice of turning any normally perceived event as a negative situation, into a positive. We are flipping our frame of mind to boost our performance. Trust me, it is possible to turn any negative into a positive, no matter what kind of situation. I can say this from personal hardship.

I lost my best friend to cancer in 2020, my father, and CTG founder, Tony Huml. I know that it is the hardest thing that I am ever going to have to go through in my life. As heartbreaking as my father's death was, I knew I had to flip my frame of mind if I wanted any type of success moving forward. Instead of cursing at God, playing victim, and feeling sorry for my father's unfairness, I accepted it. I accepted that there is nothing I can do that is going to bring my father back. I am a firm believer that everything happens for a reason. Going through the hardest moment of my life only makes me stronger. I would constantly remind myself of this. Adversity and uncomfortability is where all the growth lies. We need to run towards growth, not away from it. Here are some common frame flipping ideas for most basketball players.

Examples:

- "I can't make a shot today."
 - Flipped: Would basketball be fun if you made every shot? No. Missing is what makes the game fun, not making it.
- "I wish I was that athletic."
 - Flipped: Having to work for your athleticism pays much more benefits in the long run. Majority of athletic people don't gain a good work ethic because it has always been handed to them.
- "I'm not quick enough."
 - Flipped: Finding a way to become quicker is going to teach you how to train yourself. This is ultimately going to make you a way better basketball player.
- "I wish I wasn't injured."

- Flipped: Without this injury you wouldn't have time to reflect and balance out the rest of your life. This also gives us more time to watch film and unlock the mental side of the game.

Composure also has a huge part to play in how our perception actually becomes reality. Growing up, composure was the hardest skill for me to improve upon. I always had the mindset that I was better than everyone else. That I knew all the answers. As a result, it showed in my body language. This led to extremely good games, and extremely bad games. Without composure, there is no middle ground, and you're going to struggle to find any type of consistency.

One of the last things I ever asked my father was, "What's the biggest piece of life advice you have left for me?" My father responded, "Composure." I knew he was exactly right. I had to stop having open expressions to external stimuli that I can not control. I can't control if the refs suck. I can't control if the shot rims out. I can't control the fans in the stand. I can't control if someone was gifted with more athleticism than me. I can only control how I respond to those negative circumstances.

Having bad body language is like giving a cheat sheet to the opposing team. You're showing them your thoughts, your weaknesses, and what you're most likely to do next. It's like predator and prey. When the predator sees the prey hurt, they pounce. Having good composure is a necessity to a consistent basketball career. We always want to be unpredictable in the game of basketball, never predictable. Composed players are unpredictable players, and are the hardest players to guard.

An amazing example of composure in the NBA today is Damian Lillard. That dude is an assassin. Game winning shot? No reaction. Game missing shot? No

reaction. It's always the same. His body language is always spot on. Always in the middle ground. Not too high, and not too low. Never showing the predator his weakness.

How can we improve our composure and perceptions?:

One of my favorite analogies for body language is, "Camera is always on you." If I were to record you of just your body while you shoot a basketball, with no results of makes or misses in the frame, I should not be able to tell if you made or missed that shot. Majority of basketball players miserably fail at this drill. Start recording just your body while you train, and see what type of composure and perceptions you are displaying! Be honest with yourself and make adjustments. Composure and your perception are crucial to master in unlocking the mental side of the game.

4. Chasing Failure and Making Uncomfortability a Habit

The number one principle a CTG student must master is the ability to *chase failure*. Majority of us are taught through society that failing is never a good thing. If you truly want to achieve whatever your dreams are in life, wanting, craving, and chasing failure is how you are going to get there. When we fail, our brain adapts and learns whatever we couldn't do. If we fail more, we learn more. If we learn more, we will gain more knowledge. The more intelligent you are, the better you'll be at whatever you do in life. If you recognize yourself shying away from failure, just remember that you are getting farther and farther away from your hopes and dreams. You can conquer and achieve anything you want in this world through *chase failure*. It's only impossible until someone does it? So go out there and do it.

A question everyone should be asking themselves more is why isn't growth ALWAYS the number one focus? Think about it. Majority of us only focus on results, accomplishments, or goals. Don't get me wrong, those can be used in the right way, but shouldn't it be about becoming the best version of ourselves? When we shift into more of a growth mindset over an accomplishment mindset, we start to make huge strides in our game. What's the first step to doing this? Chasing failure. Running towards failure.

What makes you most uncomfortable? Now, think about where you want to be in 10 years. The only way you get to that vision, is if you start making your biggest uncomfortability a habit. When I first started to take ice baths, I hated them. I absolutely dreaded that part of my day. Now, I can't not take them. I enjoy them so much I feel weird when I don't take them after some of my workouts. It became automatic. Being uncomfortable with the temperature became automatic. This, just like how you build

muscle in a gym, is building that muscle in your brain to get past that uncomfortability. I like to call this the, "wall."

The, "wall," is the part of our brain that tells us to stop, even when our physical body can keep going. Just remember the next time you're tired, it's not actually your body that's tired, but your mind trying to tell you that it is. We can always, and I mean always go farther than we think we can. Our brain goes into fight or flight mode whenever it gets uncomfortable. The growth multiplies much faster AFTER the wall rather than before it. Yes, you can improve before the wall, but if you want results faster, start consistently going past your wall. Everyone gets better. The ones that get better faster are the ones who make it to the top, and stay on the top.

Present pleasures are always what keep people from future pleasures. Ask yourself, who are your goals for? Your present self? Or future self? All of you should've answered your future self. So why are we making these daily decisions that only benefit our present self? When we put our future self at the top of mind, this is when we make big strides.

How can we implement chase failure and uncomfortability being a habit?:

First, recognize yourself when you start to shy away from something, or get extremely anxious. When I was younger, I used to HATE speaking in front of other people. One time, I purposely failed a speech exam so I didn't have to speak in front of the school. Ironically, that's what I do for a living now. Over this last year I spoke in front of Adam's Elementary School about CTG's story and mission. That was one of the most nerve wracking moments of my life. I could feel my palms starting to sweat. I could feel myself start to second guess everything. Then I remembered, the fastest way to grow is

by chasing failure and being uncomfortable. I told myself that this will only make me stronger no matter the outcome. Speaking in front of the school was a huge success, and we got the opportunity to touch and influence over 100 lives.

Another awesome example of these two concepts is ball handling. Majority of players do not like to lose the ball while training. They view it as a negative. That is the complete opposite of how I got my handle. I lose the ball every 3 seconds. I NEVER have it for long while training. The longer I have it, the less growth that is occurring. Recognize this not only with dribbling in your training, but also every skill in basketball.

Find those pockets throughout your day that make you uncomfortable. Write them all down in your notebook. Then when the opportunity arises next, run towards that uncomfortability feeling instead of away. Know that every failure you have will only make you stronger and grow faster. Master these two concepts to get one step closer to unlocking the mental side of the game.

5. Mastering the Productivity Notebook and Enjoying the Process

Starting a productivity notebook in 8th grade is what changed my basketball career. A Notebook? How can that be? Well, starting that notebook created an addiction to work ethic inside of me. I truly believe anyone can achieve whatever they desire once they acquire this addiction to work ethic. Think back to when you really started to take basketball seriously. Now ask yourself, what was it like before I really started to grind? This is the stage we all start in before we become addicted to productivity.

I know you've heard people say this before, but the little things truly do have massive outcomes. I like to think of them as atomic habits. Tiny decisions. Tiny battles. Tiny habits. These all leak into the big decisions, big battles, and the big habits. Everything we do productively has a domino effect on the rest of our day. Taking control of this part of our life OUTSIDE of basketball is where true masters are born ON the court.

Over the course of the last year, I have had all my CTG students complete a productivity notebook as homework before each workout. This means a student would write down what they do productively and non-productively every single day of the week. This goes for all aspects of life, NOT just what they do for basketball. What this helped me and the students realize was what they were wasting time on, and what they could do better to get closer to achieving their goals. This also allowed them to measure their goals, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Remember that measuring is one of the biggest advantages you can have with anything in your life.

Miracle morning is another one of those books that definitely changed the outlook of my everyday life, especially in terms of productivity. It combines well with the mindset

of microhabits, little things that make a much greater impact than they appear. The story behind miracle morning is taking control of that first hour of your day. By doing this, it leads to a domino effect of decisions made after that. For example, making your bed. When we make our bed, it makes us feel like we accomplished something. As little as it might be, it matters, and it affects us. It's proven that you are more likely to get more done in a day if you have made your bed. Crazy right? I have made my bed every single day of my life after knowing this. Make Your Bed by William H Mcraven is another book that I strongly recommend that dives deeper into the science behind why making your bed is so important. This book also digests the magnitude of atomic habits.

Have you ever wondered where basketball confidence comes from? The ability to just have it, and not try to tell ourselves we have it? True inner confidence is what all elite basketball players have. It's the ability to be true to yourself without having to constantly convince yourself of what it is you are supposed to be. We gain true inner confidence by living by a code. My code is productivity, and I think productivity is the fastest way to gain true confidence. It builds us a routine. It gets us accustomed to constant growth. It shows us the fastest path on where we want to be. Find out what your code is!

How can we become addicted to productivity?:

CTG has already created their own official productivity notebook. This notebook was designed for maximum productivity, measurement, efficiency, and performance. It would last you an entire year. 20\$ for 365 days of journaling seems extremely worth it to me. The CTG productivity notebook consists of goals, workout plans, motivation, productivity logs, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and most importantly,

priorities. Priorities give us direction for the best use of our time. My suggestion to finish the final step of unlocking the mental side of the game is to get yourself a CTG productivity notebook. Change your life. Become addicted to work ethic. Become productive. Become your best self. Achieve your dreams. Do the impossible. Get the CTG productivity notebook on our website today!

Recap

The 5 Steps to Unlock the Mental Side of the Game

1. The Art of Practicing Balance
2. How to Unlock the “Zone” Whenever You Want
3. Composure and Why Perception IS Reality
4. Chasing Failure and Making Uncomfortability a Habit
5. Mastering the Productivity Notebook

Master these 5 steps of the mental game and I promise you... not only will you see insane strides throughout your basketball game, but also everywhere in your life. Remember, the mental game IS your edge. If there was a secret weapon, that is what it would be. Stop feeling like your work isn't going to pay off. Stop feeling like you're wasting your time. Stop watching others outperform you with less work. Unlock the mental side of the game today.