

Finding Your Edge: Mind-Body Bridging for Athletes

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Have you ever noticed that the moment you start thinking about your form, you've already lost it?

The best performances happen when the body just moves. When the mind gets out of the way.

The hardest part of competing isn't training the body to be ready. It's keeping the mind from interfering right when it counts most.

What Gets in the Way of Flow

In Mind-Body Bridging terms, that interference has a name: an overactive I-System, a mind-body pattern that revs up whenever our sense of identity feels on the line. For an athlete, identity is often wrapped up tightly in performance, which makes competition a near-constant trigger.

Underneath the interference are **Requirements**, rigid rules about how things should go: "I should be at my best today." "I shouldn't make mistakes in front of people." "I should already have this figured out." When the moment doesn't match the rule, the I-System reacts. Before a big moment, the **Depressor** runs storylines like "I choked last time," "everyone's watching," or "I'm not ready." Right behind it, the **Fixer** jumps in trying to manage the discomfort: overplanning the race, over-rehearsing the routine, gripping tighter instead of trusting the training that's already there.

None of that is weakness. It's a mind doing what minds do under pressure. But it pulls you out of your body and into a story, and a story doesn't have quick reflexes or a smooth swing.

What we're actually chasing in sport (that locked-in, effortless state athletes describe as "flow") is what Mind-Body Bridging calls **Natural Functioning**: the mind-body state you're in when you're fully engaged with what you're doing, without the running commentary. It's your default state, the one you're always in until the I-System takes over.

How It Shows Up in Competition

The Fixer and the Depressor show up differently depending on where you are in the season:

Before competing: spiraling nerves, over-rehearsing, second-guessing a game plan that was already solid.

Mid-competition: a single mistake turning into a mental spiral that costs the next three plays.

After a loss: harsh self-criticism that lingers for days instead of useful, specific feedback.

During injury: a storyline about what the setback "means" for your identity as an athlete.

In training: comparing yourself to teammates or an old personal best instead of noticing what today's body actually needs.

A Pre-Performance Bridge

You can't force flow, but you can clear a path to it. Many athletes we work with use a short RELACS routine in the minutes before competing: **RE**, recognizing the signal; **LA**, labeling the Requirement driving it; and **CS**, coming to your senses to return to the present.

Recognize. Notice the nervous energy, the tight chest, the urge to over-rehearse one more time.

Label. Name it plainly: "I have a Requirement that I should already be ready." "My Depressor is telling me I'm not ready." You're not obeying the story. You're just seeing it clearly.

Come to your senses. Feel your feet on the ground. Notice the weight of your equipment. Look at something real in front of you and let your eyes and ears anchor you to this moment, not the last one or the next one.

The same bridging skills help just as much off the field: recovering from a bad outing without spiraling into self-criticism, and staying grounded through injury and setbacks, when the I-System has plenty to say about what an injury "means."

Ready to Train Your Mind Like You Train Your Body?

Coaches, athletic staff, and athletes interested in bringing these skills to a team can connect with the I-System Institute about [workshops](#) built around performance and resilience, or start with a [free MBB Clinic session](#) to try the practice individually.

Flow isn't something you chase harder. It's what's left once the noise settles.