



The Death Grip. Maximum Force. Maximum Drag.

You have always believed that if you want something done right, you do it yourself. You believe that force, will, and sheer intensity are the only things standing between you and failure.

But here is the physics of performance: **Tension = Inefficiency.**

The tighter you grip the handlebars, the more road shock you absorb and the less well you steer - fatiguing your body twice as fast. Fighting the water takes more effort, creates drag and the slower you'll swim. You output massive wattage, but you are burning so much of it fighting your own anxiety. It's as if you are trying to wrestle reality to the mat. But the more you fight the flow, the faster you sink.

Unmasking "The Controller"

This Saboteur is characterized by the anxiety-based compulsion to take charge, bend people to your will, and dominate every variable. It stems from a dangerous equation you carry in your head:

My Self-Worth = My Results.

- **A "Zero-Sum" World:** To you, the world is made up of Winners and Losers. There is no grey area. If you aren't on top, dominating the field, you feel unsafe and invisible.
- **Connection Through Conflict:** You don't connect with teammates through soft emotions; you connect through challenge, competition, and "tough love." You are surprised when others get hurt by your "straight talk."
- **The Indispensable Hero:** You secretly believe that if you don't control the situation, it will fall apart. You carry the weight of the entire world (or team) on your shoulders, leading to chronic exhaustion.
- **The Lie:** "Without me pushing, everyone will get lazy and nothing will get done."
- **The Truth:** Your pushing creates resistance. It forces others to disengage, ensuring that you *have* to do it all yourself.

The Illusion of Strength

If some of this is "hitting home" take a breath. This drive is your engine. But right now it risks redlining. The overplayed strengths of the Controller are hugely valuable: **decisiveness, tenacity, impressive work ethic and high standards.** You are a force of nature. You are action-oriented, willing to do the hard work, and unafraid to lead when others freeze. You don't just see the mountain; you move it. You have the natural ability to cut through chaos and make things happen. Our goal isn't to stop you from leading; it's to help you appreciate the joy of "surfing" with life and to leverage the deep resources all around you.

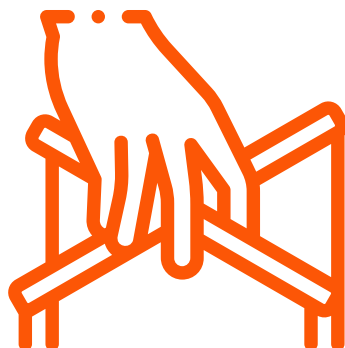
The Controller is an Energy Spendthrift. Spending huge amounts of mental and physical energy trying to bend the world to its will. Here's a Sage truth: In endurance sport, Economy is King.

The best athletes are not those who control the most; they are those who "flow" the most. Think of surfing. You cannot "control" a 20-foot wave. If you try to fight it, it will drown you. You have to surrender to its power and use your skill to ride with it.

The paradox is that while you are likely the "fittest" person you know (low body fat, high VO₂), you might be the least "healthy." Your engine is Ferrari-class, but your chassis is a 1978 Datsun Sunny cracking from the vibration.

For the Controller, relationships are often viewed as transactions or power struggles. The Controller asks, *"Is this person useful to me, or are they in my way?"* This is counter-productive as others quickly discern that our drive and energy is selfish leading to distrust, shallow relationships and distance. It's not about "us" it's about you. I only matter as a means to an end and I feel bulldozed and manipulated.

The tragedy of the Controller is that they often use achievement to try to get love. "If I am the best athlete/provider/captain, they will love me." But people *admire* achievements; they *love* humanity



“

The bamboo that bends is stronger than the oak that resists.

”

Impacts - see if any of these resonate.

(tick the box if it does)



1. Performance.

Winning the Wrong Battle

"I must win every session. If I'm not the fastest on Strava today, I am losing ground. I need to show them who is boss on the Tuesday recovery ride." You turn training into racing. You "half-wheel" your friends on easy days to assert dominance. So you arrive at race day with your best performances already left on the training road. You are "fit but fried." You win the Tuesday night practice but get dropped in the Sunday championship.

Too Tempted to Taper

"Resting feels like losing control. If I am not doing something, I am getting weaker. I need to squeeze in one more hard session to be sure." Which means you sabotage your peak. You do a "confidence workout" three days before the race that is too hard, depleting your glycogen and frying your nervous system, just to quell your own anxiety.

Fragile Under Fire

"I have planned this race to the second. I will split 4:25/km. The weather will be fine." The Controller thrives on Plan A. But races are messy. When the goggles get kicked off, or a draft pack forms ahead, or it starts hailing, the Controller panics. So you waste massive energy fighting the reality ("This shouldn't be happening!") rather than adapting to it. You crack mentally because you cannot control the external variables.

The "Uncoachable" Athlete

"I know my body better than anyone. This coach is giving me too much rest. I'll add 30 minutes to this ride. They work for me; I don't work for them." You view the coach as a subordinate rather than a partner. You constantly edit the plan to make it "harder" (because harder = more control). Therefore you neutralize the coach's expertise. You end up self-coached with a cheerleader on the sideline, repeating the same mistakes year after year because you refuse to surrender authority.

The Dominator

"I will conquer the water. I will smash these pedals." In technical sports (Swimming, XC Mountain Biking), fighting the element makes you slower. Water is 800 times denser than air; you cannot bully it. You have to work with it. So you are the swimmer thrashing wildly, expending 2x the energy for 0.8x the speed. You are the cyclist who crashes in the corner because you stayed on the brakes too long, trying to "control" the bike rather than letting it flow.

The "Comparison" Trap

"I need to see who is on the start list. Oh, 'Emily' is here? I have to beat Emily. My race is defined by where Emily is." You race the person, not the course. If Emily goes out too fast (suicide pace), you follow her because you cannot bear to be "behind." You let your competitors dictate your strategy. You blow up because you were reacting to their race rather than racing your own.

I'm the "Bottleneck"

"If I want it done right, I have to do it myself. Explaining it to someone else takes longer than just doing it. Relying on others introduces variables I can't control." This lie limits your own potential by withdrawing from the resources all around you. In sport, no one wins alone. The Tour de France winner has a team of 8 riders, 4 mechanics, 2 chefs, and a Director. You have club members, friends, a local bike shop and physio. You waste hours trying to fix your own bike or write your own training plan (badly), instead of hiring an expert. You cap your performance at the level of your own current knowledge, rather than leveraging the genius of others. Controllers never ask for help.

You are Bombproof.

"Pain is just weakness. I can force my body to perform. I will not let a tight calf dictate my schedule." The Controller views injury as an act of insubordination by the body. You try to "will" the injury away. You run through the warning signs. A 3-day niggle becomes a career-threatening stress fracture. You are "tough," but you are also broken.



Team Destroyer

"These guys are useless. I have to do everything myself. I'll take the wind for the whole ride." You disempower your teammates. You make them nervous, so they make more mistakes. This is self-fulfilling. The team performs worse than the sum of its parts. You burn out doing 150% of the work, and the team loses because you didn't trust them to do their 20%.



2. Wellbeing

The "Orthorexic" Obsession

"I must control every gram that enters my mouth. If I eat that chocolate cake, I am weak. I will use an App to track every macro to the decimal point." Nutrition becomes a source of anxiety, not nourishment. You may develop a disordered relationship with food, categorizing everything as "Good" (Success) or "Bad" (Failure). You lose the social joy of eating. You eat your Tupperware of boiled chicken and kale at your brother's wedding because you cannot surrender control for even one meal.



The Continuous Cortisol Drip

"I thrive on stress. I need to be intense to get everything done. Relaxing is for people who don't have ambition." OK. If you buy this lie you are choosing to live in a permanent state of Sympathetic Nervous System activation (Fight or Flight). You treat a traffic jam, a difficult email, and a Zone 5 interval session with the same physiological intensity. "This chronic cortisol bath inhibits recovery, kills libido, disrupts digestion, and risks hormonal burnout (HPA Axis Dysfunction). It's like burning the furniture to heat the house."



My Body Is My Slave

"My body works for me. If it hurts, it's being lazy. I will take painkillers and force it to run." You dissociate from your physical self. Instead of listening to your body's whispers (tightness, fatigue), you wait until it screams (rupture). You don't have a partnership with your body; you have a dictatorship. Dictatorships always end in rebellion. The rebellion usually looks like a catastrophic injury that forces you to lie on the sofa for 6 months.



The 3 AM Fixer

"I need to figure out exactly how to solve that work problem and fix my bike setup... right now, at 3:00 AM." The Controller hates the unconscious state of sleep because it is the ultimate loss of control. You lie awake gripping the steering wheel of your life, planning and plotting. Poor sleep quality destroys your Hormonal Regulation. You wake up fighting fatigue, requiring more caffeine and more "force" to get through the day.



"Post-Race Blues"

"Yes, that was a PB. I felt good ...for maybe 5 minutes. Now I feel empty. I need another goal immediately to fill this hole." Because your self-worth is tied to a result, the moment the result is achieved, the purpose evaporates. What now? You experience severe lows after big events. You don't know how to "just be." You are on a hedonic treadmill—running faster and faster just to stay in the same place of "ok-ness."



My Way or The Highway.

"The house is chaotic. No one is doing it right. I need to organise everyone's schedule to ensure my training fits in perfectly." You bring your "Race Face" into the living room. You manage your children and partner like employees. Your home is not a sanctuary; it is a command center. You lose the restorative power of a soft, safe home environment because you are constantly policing standards.



Identity Fragility

"I am an Ironman. That is who I am. It makes me special." If you get sick, age, or injured, you don't just lose a hobby; you lose your Self. This creates existential dread. You train out of fear of being "ordinary." You cannot relax into ageing or changing priorities because "ordinary" feels like death to the Controller.



The Iron Man

"I cannot show weakness. If I tell my friends I'm struggling with depression, they will think I'm losing my edge." Radical isolation. You have many admirers but few true friends who know the real you. You carry the weight of the world alone. This emotional load is heavy. It leads to sudden, shocking burnouts where the "strongest" person in the group suddenly quits everything.



3. Relationships

Transactional Love

"I looked after the kids on Saturday so you could visit your Mum. Now you owe me 4 hours of uninterrupted bike time this weekend." You treat marriage/partnership like a business contract. Intimacy is not a trade; it's a gift. When you keep score, your partner feels like an employee trying to earn time off. It creates a "me vs. you" dynamic instead of an "us" dynamic. You might get the time off (the result), but you breed deep resentment.



The "Project Manager" Parent

"My child needs to be the best swimmer in the club. I will stand poolside and critique their stroke. I am pushing them because I want them to excel." You confuse "Love" with "Optimisation." Your child learns that your love is conditional on their performance. They start looking at you for approval after every lap, rather than looking inside for joy. You risk raising an anxious perfectionist who eventually quits the sport to escape your "support."





The “Bulldozer” Listener

“I know where this story is going. I have the solution. I’ll interrupt them to give them the answer now to save time.” You listen to fix or to speak, not to understand. Speed is the enemy of intimacy. By rushing the conversation to the “conclusion,” you signal that your time is more valuable than their feelings. People stop sharing with you because they feel unheard and “handled.”



The “Intolerant” Teammate

“Why is Sarah crying about a DNF? She just needs to train harder. Crying solves nothing. I have no patience for this drama.” You view vulnerability as lack of competence. “She’s being emotional” is not an observation it’s a phrase loaded with your disapproval. Teammates and colleagues hide their struggles from you, meaning you can never actually help them or lead them. You become the “Scary Senior” rather than an understanding Mentor.



The “Invulnerable Fortress”

“I don’t need help changing this rear cassette. I don’t need emotional support. I am a rock. Asking for help gives others power over me.” Vulnerability is the glue of relationships. When you refuse to admit you are struggling, scared, or tired, you deny others the gift of helping you. You deny them the chance to be the hero. You stay “Strong,” but you stay lonely.



Looking back: how many boxes did you tick?

We like to think we are the pilots of our lives, but mostly, we are just passengers shouting at the turbulence. Look closely at your day. How much energy did you burn silently demanding that the traffic *should* be faster, the coffee *should* be hotter, or your legs *should* feel fresher? We are addicted to the ‘Shoulds.’

We mortgage our happiness on the impossible condition that the world must behave exactly as we planned. This is the labour of Sisyphus—pushing the boulder of expectation up the hill of reality, only to watch it roll back down every single time.

But here is the secret: **The rock doesn’t care.** Life is inherently wild, messy, and impermanent. The rain falls where it wants. The race course is not a controlled lab; it is a living thing.

When you detach your self-worth from the result, you are finally free. You can stop forcing and start flowing. You can bring all your ferocity, all your preparation, and all your strength to the starting line, but hold the outcome with a ‘light touch.’ This isn’t passivity; it is **Liberation.**

It is the difference between fighting the water and swimming. Let the ‘shoulds’ go. Embrace ‘what is.’ And watch how much faster you go when you stop dragging the heavy anchor of control behind you.

The Control Trap (And The Way Out)



Your drive and tenacity are remarkable assets. You Set high standards and get things done. You possess the 'engine' that sets PBs and wins races. However, over-emphasizing this strength can lead to a rigid Controller style. The lie is that 'If I don't force it, it won't happen.'

The goal is to shift from anxious Control to **Sage Activate** (taking decisive action in the present moment). When you accept that you cannot control life, you are perfectly equipped to bring your immense energy to 'What's needed now.'

You gain the ability to surf with life and react in the most perfect, powerful way to what is unfolding. You keep your edge, but you lose the anxiety. When you really really "get" that your self-worth is not conditional on results see what unlocks : you can be bolder, risk more, be more ambitious and redefine your relationship to failure. Coach John Wooden said, "The team that makes the most mistakes usually wins" because "the doer makes mistakes." The Controller's grip is tight but you can choose freedom.

Your 3-Step Method for Making a New Choice

This isn't just theory; this is a practical, repeatable skill. This is how you interrupt the default program and deliberately choose a more powerful, positive response.

1. CATCH THE SABOTEUR (Awareness)

The second you feel emotions like **anxiety** (when things are not going your way) or **anger, loss of control or impatience** when others don't follow or deliver as you expect. Recognise the emotions for what they are: the default program running. Mentally label it: "Controller thinking." This is the critical first step of noticing that a choice is even available

2. CREATE A PAUSE (Self-Command)

You cannot make a new choice while the old program is screaming at you. You must create a moment of quiet. For just 10 seconds bring yourself into the present moment by focusing 100% on a physical sensation (like rubbing your fingertips together or connecting with your breath). This quiets the Saboteur noise and **creates the space for a new choice.**

3. CHOOSE A POSITIVE RESPONSE (The "Sage" Choice)

In the quiet space you've created, you now have the power to choose a response that serves you instead of sabotaging you. This is where your Sage—the wisest part of you—takes over. The foundational Sage response is to know that **any circumstance can be turned into a gift or opportunity.** But this is just the beginning. The Sage has a whole toolkit of proven mental skills to handle any situation—skills to Empathize, Explore, Innovate, Navigate, and Activate.

This 3-step choice can become your new superpower. It can be automatic. It can simply be the way you live your life. **For that to happen ... you need to train.**



Become a MindFit Athlete.

Learn to thrive in sport and life.



Being here proves you're ready for change. You've seen how the Controller Saboteur hijacks your mind, and you've discovered the toolkit to fight back. As an athlete, you know that building physical fitness takes commitment and a proven training plan. So what if you had a system **for your mind**? A proven system that takes less than 15 minutes a day and comes with the coach support to make it stick?

This is your formal invitation to install that system.

The MindFit Foundation Programme

This is our year-long mental fitness programme where we take these concepts and apply them until they become your new default. This isn't about simply gaining knowledge; it's an experiential, app-based course combined with ongoing coaching designed to transform how you think by building new neural pathways. We focus on three core principles:



1. Saboteur Interception

You'll gain the power to intercept and discredit the Saboteurs that generate stress, self-doubt, and discontent. You'll become aware of negative thoughts and feelings as they happen.



2. Self-Command

You'll learn to quiet the Saboteurs and activate the Sage part of your brain in seconds. This allows you to handle challenges with a clear, calm mind instead of stressing over what you can't control.



3. Apply the "Sage" Skillset

Your Sage is how you handle challenges with positive emotions. You will learn to boost all 5 of its primary powers: Empathize, Explore, Innovate, Navigate, and Activate, and know exactly which skill to apply to any problem.

Now is your moment to choose. Go back to the "same old same old"? Or start your MindFit journey by taking our free 4 video introductory course series where you'll discover the mental edge that unlocks success in endurance sport and richness in life.



I WANT TO LEARN MORE. SHOW ME THE FREE COURSE!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR & IMPORTANT CONTEXT



— Bridging the Gap Between Physical & Mental Performance

ABOUT THE COACH

This profile was created by **John Rea**.

I am a **Certified British Triathlon Personal Coach**, a **Certified Positive Intelligence (PQ) Coach** and a **Member of the International Coaching Federation**.

In the world of endurance sport, we spend hours training the body—measuring watts, pace, and heart rate—yet we often neglect the operating system that drives it all: the mind. My work exists at the intersection of these two disciplines. By combining the physiological discipline of British Triathlon coaching with the neurological framework of Positive Intelligence, I help athletes build the “Mental Fitness” required to not just endure their sport, but to thrive in it.

A NOTE ON MENTAL HEALTH & TRAUMA

While the Positive Intelligence® framework is a powerful tool for explaining performance anxiety and mental blocks in sport, it is vital to distinguish between habituated mindset patterns and clinical mental illness or trauma.

Words used in these profiles—such as “Victim,” “Hyper-Vigilant,” “Avoider,” or “Pleaser”—are used strictly in a coaching context to describe universal, everyday cognitive habits that limit athletic potential. They do not refer to, nor do they diminish, the real experience of being a survivor of abuse, trauma, or systemic injustice.

Important Disclaimer: This content is offered strictly for educational and athletic coaching purposes. It is **not** a substitute for medical or psychological diagnosis, counselling, or treatment. If you are navigating past trauma, clinical depression, severe anxiety, suicidal ideation, or any other physical, emotional, or mental health challenges, **this coaching material is not the appropriate intervention**. I strongly advise you to seek the immediate or timely support of a qualified physician (GP), psychologist, or psychotherapist.

I am a certified performance coach, not a licensed medical or mental health professional. I do not diagnose, prescribe, or treat medical or psychological conditions. My focus is exclusively on helping healthy athletes optimize their mental fitness for peak performance.

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