



The Joyless, Insidious Exhaustion of Chronic Fear.

You have a deep rooted belief that life is hostile. Life is out to get you. If it can go wrong.. it will. So your defense is a paranoid offense. If you can just anticipate every single thing that could possibly go wrong—the weather, the gear, the nutrition, the competition— then (just maybe) you can compete.

Imagine driving a car with your foot hovering over the brake, constantly tapping it at every shadow on the road. You burn through brake pads, you waste fuel, and the ride is incredibly jerky. When you constantly brace for impact, your muscles are in a state of continuous contraction. You are the athlete standing on the start line with a heart rate of 120 bpm because your brain is already fighting a headwind that hasn't happened yet. You carry the weight of a thousand "What ifs." But the more you brace for the future, the less power you have in the present.

Unmasking “The Hyper-Vigilant”

You've downloaded this profile because you suspect your performance—and your peace of mind—are being drained by the Saboteur known as the Hyper-Vigilant. This is the anxiety-based compulsion to continuously scan the horizon for threats, dangers, and worst-case scenarios. It stems from a dangerous equation you carry in your head: **My Safety = My Ability to Predict Disaster.**

Just how much does this sound like you?

- **The “What-If” Spiral:** You check the weather forecast ten times a day the week before a race. You pack three different pairs of goggles, just in case. Your transition bag looks like a survival kit.

- **The Phantom Injury:** You are hyper-tuned to your body, but in a toxic way. Every slight twinge, muscle ache, or moment of fatigue is immediately catastrophic. *"Is my Achilles tearing? Am I getting sick?"*
- **The Trust Deficit:** You struggle to trust the process, the coach, or your own fitness. If a training block goes well, you don't feel confident; you feel suspicious, waiting for the other shoe to drop.
- **The Lie:** "If I worry about everything that could go wrong, I will be prepared for anything."
- **The Truth:** Worrying is not preparation; it is just suffering in advance. You cannot out-think chaos. As Mark Twain famously said, *"I am an old man and have known a great many troubles, most of which never happened."*

If some of this is "hitting home," take a breath. This hyper-awareness is actually born from a profound strength. The overplayed strengths of the Hyper-Vigilant are hugely valuable: you are highly observant, detail-oriented, reliable, and excellent at risk management. You are the athlete who *actually* remembered the spare pump and the first-aid kit. I'll bet you know just how tight that tire is on the rim and you have the tool to remove it. You are rarely caught out by foolish mistakes. Our goal isn't to make you careless; it's to help you distinguish between *productive preparation* and *destructive paranoia*.

The Illusion of Control

The Hyper-Vigilant is the "Prepper" Saboteur. They are the "Scanners." In endurance sports, you cannot control the current, and you cannot negotiate with a puncture. You are spending huge amounts of cognitive and physiological energy fighting imaginary fires. In our Controller profile we confront the truth that life is inherently uncontrollable. Of course we should prepare as best we can: President Eisenhower said "plans are worthless, but planning is everything". He meant that the discipline and process of making plans make it possible to adapt and change course when the unexpected happens.

In high performance, Adaptability beats Predictability. The best athletes do not try to predict every wave; they build a boat that can handle rough water. Think of a mountain biker on a technical descent. If they stare at the rock they are terrified of hitting, they will hit it (target fixation). They have to look at the *path through*. The Hyper-Vigilant is constantly staring at the rocks. The paradox is that you are likely the most "prepared" person in the transition area, but you are the least "ready." Your gear is perfect, but your **mind** is fried.



The Core Lie: A Crisis of Self-Trust

If you strip away the checklists, the spare gear, and the frantic weather-checking, the Hyper-Vigilant Saboteur is built on one foundational lie: **"I am not capable of handling it when things go wrong."** To beat this Saboteur, we must understand the critical difference between *Confidence* and *Self-Confidence*:

- **Confidence** is based on data:

"I believe I can do this because I have done it before."

- **Self-Confidence** is based on trust:

"I trust my ability, resilience, and judgment to figure this out, even though I have never done it before."

The Hyper-Vigilant is obsessed with the first and completely devoid of the second. Because you don't trust yourself (and often others) to adapt to chaos, you try to eliminate chaos entirely through preparation. You think that if you can just anticipate every threat, you will finally feel "ready." But true readiness isn't about having all the answers in advance; it is about having faith in your ability to find the answers in the moment.



The Emotion Trap

What are you actually afraid of when you worry about a DNF, a bad race, or a mistake? You aren't afraid of the event; you are afraid of the *emotion* you will feel afterward—the shame, the embarrassment, the disappointment. The Hyper-Vigilant tells you that a negative emotion is a disaster that must be avoided at all costs. But a self-confident athlete knows a powerful Sage truth: **The worst thing that can ever happen to you is just an emotion.** And there is no emotion that can permanently harm you.

When you realize that life is not something to resist or fear and that circumstances (like a headwind or a flat tire) are entirely neutral, they stop being threats and start becoming exactly what they are: variables for you to play with. You don't need to be fully prepared to take action; you just need to trust that you can handle the outcome.

As the great entrepreneur Dan Sullivan says: *"I want to tell you the difference between fear and courage: Fear is wetting your pants. Courage is doing what you're supposed to do with wet pants."* Your Hyper-Vigilant Saboteur is waiting for the fear to go away before you race. A Champion races anyway.

Impacts - see if any of these resonate.

(tick the box if it does)



1. Performance.

Tactical Blindness (The Narrowed Field)

The Hyper-Vigilant Lie: *"I must stick exactly to my planned numbers, or I will blow up."*

A racing mind scanning for threats literally narrows your perceptual field. You lose your peripheral awareness and your tactical creativity. You become so fixated on not exceeding a specific wattage on your bike computer that you miss the opportunity to legally draft a competitor who just overtook you. Staying in their legal draft zone would allow you to drop your watts and increase your speed, but your fear-based focus keeps you locked out of that "in-the-moment" play.

The Somatic Straitjacket (Unconscious Physical Tension)

The Hyper-Vigilant Lie: *"I need to physically brace myself for whatever is coming."*

Hyper-vigilance generates a low-grade, constant physical tension that you often aren't even aware of. If you stop and do a "body check" right now, you might find your shoulders creeping up to your ears, tension locking your neck and chest, or your breathing becoming shallow and trapped in your upper chest rather than deep and diaphragmatic. This is a state of chronic somatic tension. It means you destroy your own fluidity. Imagine a basketball player stepping up for a game-winning shot in the final seconds. Could they ever sink that shot with tight, jerky, braced muscles? Absolutely not. Elite execution requires relaxation. In endurance sports, racing in this constant state of "bracing" is profoundly fatiguing. You burn massive amounts of energy simply fighting your own muscular resistance before you even push the pedals or take a stride.

"Survival Mode" (Fear of Risk-Taking)

The Hyper-Vigilant Lie: *"It's too dangerous to try that line on the descent. I should just play it safe."*

You become overcautious and hesitant to take the calculated risks needed for competitive success. You focus on avoiding the negatives rather than embracing the challenge. You ride the brakes, losing free speed, because your focus becomes survival mode rather than pushing your limits confidently.

The Phantom Injury (Catastrophizing Discomfort)

The Hyper-Vigilant Lie: *"That twinge in my calf means my race is over."*

A hyper-vigilant athlete fixates on minor aches and pains, amplifying their significance. Normal sensations of fatigue or lactic acid are twisted into catastrophic signals of impending collapse. You may give up prematurely or adopt compensatory movements that result in actual, physical injuries

The Pre-Race Battery Drain (Cognitive Exhaustion)

The Hyper-Vigilant Lie: *"If I analyse every possible disaster now, I won't be caught off guard later."*

The incessant stream of "what ifs" and worst-case scenarios clouds your attention. Being in a constant state of high alert is neurologically draining. Your brain consumes roughly 20% of your body's energy. By fighting imaginary ghosts for 48 hours before the gun goes off, you arrive at the start line with depleted glycogen stores and a fried central nervous system.

The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy (The Open Water Panic)

The Hyper-Vigilant Lie: *"The swim start is pure chaos. I'm going to get crushed, I won't be able to breathe, and I'm bound to panic."*

You pre-load your nervous system with so much dread about the environment where you have the least control (the water) that you enter the race already in a physiological state of emergency. This is the ultimate self-fulfilling prophecy. Because you are standing on the beach with a sky-high heart rate and shallow, upper-chest breathing, the very first piece of incidental physical contact from another swimmer pushes you over the edge. You hyperventilate, swallow water, and trigger a full-blown panic attack.

Even if you manage to avoid a panic attack, your race strategy is ruined. Your Hyper-Vigilant Saboteur convinces you to start late or hang far at the back to avoid the "washing machine". Once swimming, you are too afraid of contact to draft on fast feet. Consequently, you exit the water completely isolated, having permanently missed the opportunity to work with the best athletes in the lead pack on the bike. The emotional toll of this repeated anxiety is often what drives athletes to quit the sport entirely



The Confidence Eraser

The Hyper-Vigilant Lie: *"I know I trained hard, but I'm just not strong enough to handle this course/competition."*

Worry systematically erodes your self-belief, causing you to second-guess your abilities and decisions during critical moments. Past successes, skills and deep experience is dismissed. You start tentatively, your focus on is the negative: did I choose the right clothing for today, did I tighten my front wheel skewer properly, is my chain going to break, I'm working hard but being passed - what's going on? Where's the joy? Where's the pleasure of settling down, executing the plan, adapting to each moment as it unfolds and loving just being in the sport?



The Sabotaged Pivot (Rigidity in Chaos)

The Hyper-Vigilant Lie: *"If Plan A fails, the race is a complete disaster."*

You have extreme difficulty handling setbacks, taking a bump in the road and turning it into a career-ending disaster. When you drop a water bottle or miss a split time, instead of focusing on problem-solving, you berate yourself and become consumed by fear of making further mistakes. This leads to overly cautious racing and hesitation. You lose the ability to fluidly transition to Plan B.



The Glass Half-Empty. (Focusing on Shortcomings)

The Hyper-Vigilant Lie: *"It doesn't matter that I PB'd; my transition was terrible. If only I'd..."*

Hyper-vigilance creates a mental shortcut where the brain *primarily* focuses on what's wrong. Accomplishments are quickly overshadowed by perceived flaws. Because success is never savoured, you never build the deep reservoir of self-efficacy (belief in your own competence) required for your very best performance.



Inability to Stay Present

The Hyper-Vigilant Lie: *"I need to worry about the climb at mile 80, even though I'm only at mile 10."*

You are rarely fully present in the moment. Your mind is scanning for potential problems, dwelling on past mistakes, or obsessing over future outcomes. You compromise your ability to 'zone in' on your true potential. You miss vital tactical cues in the race because your head is stuck in a hypothetical future.



The "Safe Bet" Ceiling (Playing Small)

The Hyper-Vigilant Lie: *"It is better to finish comfortably and safely than to risk blowing up and failing completely."* Taking a risk feels so neurologically stressful that you intentionally play a smaller, safer game than you are capable of. You refuse to stretch yourself into the uncomfortable "growth zone." By constantly obsessing over the downside, you completely cap your upside. You become a master of the "mediocre finish." Because you will not risk failure, you guarantee that you will never reach your true, ultimate potential in the sport.



2. Wellbeing

The Adrenal Drain (Chronic Exhaustion)

"If I don't stay on high alert, something terrible will catch me off guard."

Your nervous system cannot tell the difference between a real physical threat and an imagined flat tire. Because you are constantly scanning for danger, your body is perpetually flooded with stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline. You are effectively running a marathon of anxiety every single day, leaving you chronically exhausted and neurologically depleted before you even start your actual training



The Loss of Play (The Joyless Grind)

"This isn't supposed to be fun; this is a serious test of survival."

Sport, which once provided a space for fun, challenge, and spontaneity, becomes a means of self-criticism and a constant battle against perceived threats. Every training session morphs into a high-stakes test. You lose your intrinsic motivation because the joy of play—the very reason you likely started the sport—is tragically lost.



The Guilt of Peace (Denial of Joy)

"If I relax and feel happy right now, I'm dropping my guard. I'll be punished for being complacent."

The Hyper-Vigilant believes that relaxation equals recklessness. You literally deny yourself permission to feel peace or satisfaction. You subconsciously believe that feeling joy is letting yourself—and your goals—down. This makes your sport, and your life, a joyless pursuit where you can never simply exhale and enjoy the present moment.



The Sleep Thief (Inability to Disconnect)

"I can't sleep yet; I haven't figured out what my backup plan is if the wind shifts tomorrow."

Your mind is a relentless problem-solving machine that refuses to power down. Even during designated rest periods, you ruminate on past workouts or build anxiety about future sessions. This inability to mentally disconnect keeps your nervous system in sympathetic overdrive, compromising your deep, restorative sleep and halting physical recovery.



The Pessimism Filter (Negative Bias)

"That good workout was just a fluke. The real disaster is still coming."

Our brains love shortcuts, and hyper-vigilance trains your brain to primarily focus on what is wrong. You filter out positive information and successes, drawn disproportionately to perceived threats and flaws. This literal rewiring of your brain cultivates an undercurrent of mild, endless dissatisfaction and a chronic "glass half-empty" mood.



Decision Fatigue (Analysis Paralysis)

"If I make the wrong choice here, the consequences will be unrecoverable." Because you view every minor choice as laden with potential disaster, your brain is bogged down by exaggerated fears. Deciding which tyres to run, what nutrition to pack, or when to take a rest day becomes an agonizing, overwhelming process. This "analysis paralysis" drains your cognitive reserves and turns a hobby into a heavy administrative burden.



The "If Only..." Dissatisfaction

"I survived the race, but if only I had planned better, it wouldn't have been so messy."

Instead of appreciating the present or celebrating your resilience, you live with a constant "if only" mentality. You dissect every training block and race for the mistakes you made. This strips away the satisfaction derived from the hard work you've already put in, guaranteeing you never feel like you are "enough".





3. Relationships

The “Crying Wolf” Phenomenon (Loss of Credibility)

“If I don’t warn them about every possible risk, they will fail, and it will be my fault.”

You see tigers everywhere, even when there are only shadows. Whether you are warning your spouse about the dangers of their upcoming journey, or detailing every single way a new marketing campaign at work could fail, your danger radar is over-calibrated. Because the vast majority of the disasters you predict never materialize, the all those around you (your tribe) eventually stops listening. You lose your credibility and your voice because people learn to tune out the constant alarms.



Assuming Worst Intent

“Why did they do it that way? They are being careless, or worse, they are trying to undermine the plan.”

Because you view the world as inherently hostile, you begin to suspect people’s motives. A forgotten task by a training partner or a missed deadline by a coworker isn’t viewed as a simple human error; it is perceived as a threat to your stability. You view peers as potential threats rather than collaborators. This constant suspicion breeds defensiveness in your relationships, replacing empathy with interrogation



The “Vortex of Anxiety” (The Contagion Effect)

“I need to carry the worry for everyone so we are all prepared.” Anxiety is highly contagious. When our Sage brain is using healthy vigilance to protect the group, people feel a relaxing sense of safety—someone is carefully watching the perimeter. But when the Hyper-Vigilant Saboteur takes over, you project a literal vortex of nervous energy. You walk into the kitchen or the boardroom, and your spouse or your team instantly feels on edge. The intensity of your negative energy drains the people around you, exhausting them before the work has even begun.



The Trust Deficit (Chronic Micromanagement)

“People inevitably mess up. I have to oversee every detail myself to ensure we are safe.”

You project your expectation of disaster onto other people’s competence. You constantly second-guess your coach’s training methods or rewrite a colleague’s perfectly good project report because it wasn’t done *your way*. This chronic micromanagement creates deep tension and erodes trust. When you refuse to relinquish control, you send a clear, damaging message to your team and your family: *“I do not trust you to be capable.”*

Looking back: how many boxes did you tick?



A Mind Like Water

David Allen, the author of *Getting Things Done*, talks of having a “mind like water.” Throw a pebble into a pond, and how does the water react? **Totally appropriately.** It doesn't overreact, and it doesn't underreact. The Hyper-Vigilant mind is a mind reacting to life totally inappropriately. It is over-calibrated to see risk and threat everywhere.

If you have experienced a PQ Rep, you know the truth: **stress does not exist in the present moment.** No matter your situation, peace of mind and calm can be experienced during a PQ Rep, proving that feelings of anxiety, vulnerability, and threat are generated by your *thoughts* about life's circumstances—NOT the circumstances themselves. It is your Saboteur generating the stress, not life. This is incredibly good news. You can unlearn this Saboteur conditioning. You can replace the Hyper-Vigilant lies with the Sage truth that any circumstance can be transformed into a gift or an opportunity.

A “mind like water” knows that 80% of imagined risks will either be totally outwith your control, just won't happen, or will turn out just fine with very little engagement from you. The other 20% represent risks that do have a high likelihood of happening and are within your control to manage. With these, you can react “totally appropriately.” You can use a calm, clear-headed, laser-focused vigilance to protect against them. But after those initial few seconds of risk awareness, no further worry is needed. You trust yourself to cope with the 80% if it ever happens, and you act decisively on the 20%.

This is a practice. It is not a switch. The Hyper-Vigilant mind benefits from frequent, long PQ Rep sessions, a commitment to stay present, the constant sorting of what is 80% and what is 20%, and a deep awareness of the bodily tension that signals the Saboteur's return.

The prize is worth the time investment.

The anxious mind misses out on the exquisite thrill of the unknown. Where the Hyper-Vigilant sees a chaotic swim start or a treacherous crosswind, the Sage mind simply reads the energy, adjusts its rhythm, and surfs the momentum in a split-second, intuitive synthesis. You stop treating the course as a minefield to be survived, and start treating it as a dynamic environment to be explored.

A Hyper-Vigilant life is a life experienced behind heavy armour—rigid, breathless, and completely isolated from the joy of the elements. Mastery is shedding that mental armour. It is experiencing your sport with an unclenched jaw and dropped shoulders, feeling the quiet, stable power of knowing you don't need to predict every danger to be safe. It is cultivating a mind like water.



The Hyper-Vigilant Trap (And The Way Out)



In sport, the Hyper-Vigilant athlete is often the most prepared person who least enjoys the day. You've worked so hard, yet your race becomes an exhausting mental torture. What we rarely admit about chronic anxiety is that it is profoundly self-absorbed. When your brain is convinced you are under threat, your world shrinks to the size of your own panic. You become trapped in a tight, suffocating bubble of "my gear," "my splits," and "my survival." Meticulous care becomes a mental prison, isolating you from the very experience you trained for.

The ultimate Hyper-Vigilant kryptonite is **Gratitude**. Physiologically, you cannot be deeply grateful and panicked at the same time. Gratitude breaks the anxious trance by forcing your focus outward. When you realise the race is wholly designed to support you, when you take the time to genuinely thank an aid station volunteer, or just appreciate the privilege of a healthy body, you shatter the illusion of threat. If you can learn to still your mind, to drop any projections of the future and just be fully present you'll hear the Sage whisper: that whatever happens, you **do** have the self-confidence to find a way through. Right here. Right now. You are enough. This is the moment you, your sport, and life fuse in one joyous celebration. Embrace it.

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, fear, edginess, distrust or even cynicism or you notice the Judge of Self saying "This isn't good enough. You aren't ready." Recognise the emotions for what they are: the default program running. Mentally label it: "**Hyper-Vigilant 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 Hyper-Vigilant 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.

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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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