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Unlocking Greatness in the Stanley Cup Chase

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THE DAILY COACH

Unlocking Greatness in the Stanley Cup Chase

That gap — between what happens and how you respond — is where your influence lives.

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There's a reason the Stanley Cup is often considered the hardest trophy to win in sports. It's not just the physical toll of a deep playoff run — it's the mental toughness required to navigate the unpredictable swings a series can take.

The 2024 Stanley Cup Final was an iconic example of this. After falling behind 3–0 in the series to the Florida Panthers, the Edmonton Oilers clawed their way back to force a Game 7 — becoming just the third team in NHL history to do so. Though the Panthers ultimately lifted the Cup, the Oilers' monumental turnaround displayed a level of resilience, belief, and collective focus that went beyond tactics or talent. At the heart of their comeback was mentality.

“Moments like this can be very stressful. Being able to stay light takes a lot of experience,” said Edmonton goalie Stuart Skinner when the team was down 2–0 in the series. “We’ve dug ourselves a little bit of a hole, and it’s our choice whether we’re going to climb out of it or not.”

Guiding the team’s mindset was performance psychologist George Mumford, whose presence helped the team steady itself internally before it could perform externally. Mumford — best known for guiding elite athletes like Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant — became a steadying influence behind the scenes in Edmonton throughout the season.

His book *Unlocked* gives a glimpse into the type of guidance he provides to athletes. When we’re at our best, everything clicks — skills, focus, and intention align, and we move with purpose and ease. Athletes sometimes describe this state by saying they’re “slowing the game down,” “letting the game come to them,” or “seeing the puck (or ball) more clearly.” Mumford calls this being *unlocked* — and it’s a powerful mental state not reserved for the elite, but available to anyone willing to train their mind to access it.

The space between stimulus and response is where power lies. Greatness isn’t something to chase — it’s something to access. Through mindfulness, presence, and emotional awareness, Mumford teaches athletes to respond rather than react.That’s how to find clarity amid chaos.

This isn’t just a tool for athletes. The ability to pause, reset, and choose your response matters just as much in everyday life. It might look like taking a breath before reacting in a tough meeting, staying grounded when plans fall apart, or keeping your cool in a high-pressure moment.

That gap — between what happens and how you respond — is where your influence lives. Mumford’s work reminds us: it’s not just about how skilled or prepared you are — it’s about how present you’re willing to be when it counts.

Whether you’re chasing a championship or simply trying to lead with clarity under pressure, learning to access that space is where true power begins.

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