

The Phoenix Trail Fest 50k at Lake Lurleen State Park

Race Day Visualization

Congratulations on registering to take on the Phoenix Trail Fest 50k!

Below you will learn about race mindset, strategy, and mindfulness. After that, is your race day visualization! Wrapping things up, you will find out where you can get some more free mindset and mental wellness resources to help you finish stronger in your race and in life.

I wish you all the best in your training!

Happy running,

Coach Shannon

Note: This visualization is for the 2024 Phoenix Trail Fest 50k race course. I do my best to make these race day visualizations as accurate as possible by including aid stations and other notable course features; however, be aware that the race course, aid station names, etc. may be changed at any time by the race management.

I will not be keeping up with course changes regularly and race management does not notify me of any changes that they make. The good news is, even if the race course changes, this visualization will still be beneficial in a general sense.

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Race mindset and strategy

Ultrarunners, how do you feel at the start line of your race? Are you filled with excitement and gratitude or do you find yourself feeling nervous? Some nervousness is natural, you want to perform well, which can be a “positive stress.” Your race start mindset and strategy is key, it helps set the tone of your race.

Here is a great way to start your race, begin with a positive and strong mindset and remain in the present moment. This strategy is for the start line and for the front portion of the race, especially as you get comfortable and settle into a pace. As you are doing your pre-race activities, it is good to take a moment to reflect on your race training strengths and previous successes.

Successes can come from training or races. Reflecting and reminiscing will increase feelings of gratitude and reinforce that positive and strong mindset. You made it to the event; it is something to be proud of and should be celebrated. Enjoy your race!

Acknowledge nervousness and any other emotions, but focus should be in the present, right where you are at. Do not stress over a potential problem until it happens. Rest in knowing that you should be able to solve it when it occurs because of your previous experiences in training and racing. You are knowledgeable!

We also need to be able to practice our approach to dealing with things outside of our control, in life and in racing. Thinking should be flexible.

Flexible thinking examples: seeing something from a few different perspectives, having two or more possible solutions, or being non-judgmental of our thoughts and emotions.

Returning to addressing the worries of potential problems, remind yourself that there are race volunteers, crew, and pacers who can lend a hand. You can handle it; you can take care of it.

Start your race on the right foot, with gratitude, knowing what you do well, how you can use your problem-solving skills, and staying present. Thrive off connecting with your body, the race environment, and other athletes. Own your mindset!



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What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is **choosing to be aware of the present moment, on purpose, and in a non-judgmental way.** When being mindful, our attention and focus is on whatever we choose to observe or do. In this moment, choose to focus your mind wherever you would like it to be.

Maybe you focus on your emotions, thoughts, and physical sensations as you experience the environment around you. You may also choose to focus on an object. One thing and one moment at a time.

Hold your attention there, focusing on being in the moment. Redirect your focus mindfully, gently, whenever you are ready.

Benefits of mindfulness

Researchers have found positive benefits to mindfulness meditation, including reduced stress, increased focus and attention, regulation of emotions, greater self-compassion, acceptance of current situations, and pain management. Counselors working with clients and students have found that dispositional mindfulness and mindful meditation can increase empathy, self-efficacy, and self-awareness.

People also reported experiencing mental, physical, and emotional shifts during or after practicing a mindfulness meditation. Specifically, people experienced mental relief and achieving some clarity.

Their bodies became more relaxed and their breathing slowed. The predominant emotions were calmness and happiness.



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Who can mindfulness help?

Mindful interventions are effective in reducing or managing symptoms related to diagnoses of posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, and substance use disorders.

I have used appropriate parts of mindful interventions when working with people who struggle with eating disorders, though this is something that I need to be very careful of and know my client very well, as it brings attention to the body and physical sensations that are things to be considerate of with eating disorders.

A little disclaimer

As with any exercise, make sure that you are informed prior to starting it. Know that when we practice mindfulness, we will be aware of emotions, thoughts, and physical sensations. What comes to us through mindfulness is a part of being human.

We all experience emotions, thoughts, and physical sensations. They will come and go. Just know that you will experience these things, and if they become too intense, have a helpful backup plan to manage what comes up.

Your backup plan needs to be in place before beginning the exercise. I recommend going through a few mindful exercises with an experienced professional before using mindfulness as a coping strategy or tool.



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Practicing mindfulness (in general)

Tips:

Practice regularly, five minutes, once per week is a good amount, but feel free to do more. Remember that this is a skill, it needs to be learned.

Not everyone may connect with this skill.

1. Let go of judgments

We all have judgments. Whenever you notice yourself judging, let the judgment pass through and drift off, do not allow it to stick around. Judgments should come and go like clouds and ocean waves.

2. Practicing mindfulness in the moment

Be present in the “small moments.”

Example:

Take 10 minutes and clean part of your home, fully immersing yourself in the process.

When you find yourself distracted, this could be a judgmental thought, refocus on what you are doing. Full focus and attention, non-judgmentally.

3. Meditation

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A thought on meditation. Meditation can be considered anything if you are present, being non-judgmental, and have an open heart.

4. Practice

Meditate on your life experiences, starting with the moment you are currently in. Stay present for some time, connecting to the moment, then, when you're ready, shift your focus to another moment.

5. Teflon mind

Let potentially stressful situations, criticisms, or anything else that might "stick" to you, causing needless suffering, roll off your mind. Allow these experiences to slide through your awareness.

6. Dealing with distractions

Distractions do not go away; they are a part of this world. Do not get frustrated with distractions, they are reminders to go back to what you are working on. They are natural.

When you become distracted, bring yourself back to the present moment. Do this over, and over, and over again, if you need to.

7. Taking hold of your mind

Direct your mind where you want it. There are many thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations to direct your attention towards. Choose one of those, opening your mind to it and closing your attention off from the other options.

If your mind drifts towards a closed off option, gently re-close it and return to the option of choice.

Mindfulness on the trail

Be aware and pay attention: by watching, listening, and considering the environment. This is what is naturally occurring.

Engage your five senses, connect with your body, and the Earth.

Examples: What you see, hear, smell; feeling the ground with your feet as you run; noticing your breathing; listening to the crunching of leaves; noticing the shadows on the ground; watching the clouds

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slowly reshape; noticing the texture of rocks; noticing shades of lighting in the woods; water and mud as you run through it; paying attention to thirst and hunger or gut cues.

Final tips for practicing your mindfulness skills

Schedule skill use: Many people start with great intentions for doing skillful behaviors, but they lack follow-through. Schedule time to practice skillful behaviors, write them in your planner or on your calendar, treat them like a “to-do” list.

Stick with it: Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary defines a skill as “the ability to do something that comes from training, experience, or practice.” Being skillful is not automatic, so don’t be discouraged if it takes time and practice for skills to work. Stick with it, and the benefits that will come from your skills will be self-reinforcing in time.

Applying mindfulness to trail running and racing

Practice mindfulness at home and on the trail. Practice at home because it supports your mental health and may help you get through rough days. Practice even when things are going well, not just when you are struggling. As you practice the exercises at home, you will be able to transfer the learned skills to the trail.

As we are mindful while running, there will be more awareness between the mind and body. We can connect more with our bodies and environment. The more in-tune with things, the more power we have. The more we can stick to our goals and achieve them. We can better regulate our emotions and problem-solve.



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Video:

<https://www.loom.com/share/bc3e41a3a48c4a18b23dd581297a6feb?sid=64df2ec6-f9d5-4921-b9dd-5fa859ea10f4>

Transcript:

You can do this a couple of times leading up to the race, taper time!

Sit comfortably, close your eyes, and take time to notice the eb and flow of your breath.

Bring your awareness to your breath, notice it enter and exit your nose, and the rise and fall of your belly.

Breathe in, breathe out. Find any tension in your body and allow it to flow out with every exhale.

Guide your awareness to the front space of your mind and hold your attention there.

Visualize the start line at the beach area. Visualize the colors of the starting coral. Notice all the visual details of the starting corral. Are there banners? Race crews? Spectators?

Notice the time of day. The weather. The refreshing air in your lungs.

Visualize yourself lining up at the start, ready to conquer your goal.

What are you wearing? Picture yourself in your shoes, race outfit, and with all your gear.

Are you wearing shorts? How about your shirt? Are you wearing a hat? What shoes are you wearing?

Do you have any water and nutrition on you?

Your watch is ready.

The race is about to begin, the signal goes off that the race has begun.

You start into a light jog on the paved roads from the South Trail Head Pavilion. There is no need to go out too hard. Let your body ease into comfortable pace and stick to your plan.

People will go off ahead of you, allow them to go. Be with your appropriate, relaxed pace. Many runners will tire and you will catch them later in the race.

During this first portion of the race, you will feel calm and pace yourself appropriately. Your effort feels brisk and good, hold onto that feeling. Follow the six Ps: Proper pacing prevents piss poor performance.

The race course is a mix of pavement and single track. The single track trail follows the lake's edge at times. Take in the scenery.

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Knowing that the first aid station is coming up, notice if you might need any water. Aid station 1 is unmanned.

Arriving at aid station 1, grab what you need. Do you need water? Maybe you pass by without grabbing any because you have all you need.

After the first aid station, you proceed, feeling strong and confident as you glide over the lush green trail.

At mile 4.6, you will enter the first full aid station. Hear the volunteers cheer for you and greet you. Grab what you need. Do you need water? A gel? A piece of fruit? If you would like, allow the friendly volunteers to assist you.

After grabbing what you need, you are feeling good.

Over the next few miles, you continue to enjoy the trail and trail community. Notice who is around you. Are you having conversations with others? Are you sticking with your plan?

After covering almost two more miles, you reach aid station 3. Continue to take care of yourself. Before leaving the aid station, take what you need fuel wise for until you complete the loop. In about 3 to 4 miles, you will reach the 4th aid station, which is unmanned.

At this point of nearing the end of your first loop, you feel great as you maintained your pace appropriately at the first third of the race. Hold onto that great feeling.

You arrive to the paved section and fly towards the start and finish area.

The park is beautiful and you soak in the experience.

Before the start and finish area, ask yourself, do you need water? Electrolytes? A sandwich? Get what you need and continue running strong. You need enough fuel to get you to aid station 2.

After completing your first loop, you are feeling accomplished and focused on pacing and taking care of yourself again on another loop.

As your feet hit the dirt trail, you soak in the beautiful views of the lake. The trail winds through the woods.

Getting closer to aid station 1, check-in and ask yourself, do you need water? Grab some if you need it.

Continue to aid station 2, have a flexible, yet strong mind. Repeat to yourself, "You got this."

Have fun on the rolling hills and little bridges that you cross.

Aid station 3 is about halfway on the second loop. Awesome work! Keep it up!

As you run, you continue to follow your race plan and you handle any issues that pop up. You are mindful of your effort on the hills and are racing smart.

You remind yourself of why you are out there.



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Entering aid station 4, you take in the pretty scenery. Check-in with yourself, how are you feeling? What do you need? After getting what you need, you can think to yourself that the next time that you see that spot will be your last.

Back on the pavement, you are focused and feeling determined.

Excitement builds as you are reaching the start and finish area of the second time. Spectators, crew, and volunteers cheer you on. You feel uplifted.

Running through the park and seeing where you will be finishing positively reinforces your mindset, what you set out to do.

Before the beach area, check-in with yourself. What do you need? Do you need to rehydrate? Do you need electrolytes? Are you feeling a little hungry? Do you need sunscreen? Take what you need. Do you rest for a moment or do you get right back out there?

Are you picking up a pacer?

Feeling refreshed, you leave for your final loop. It is the final third of the race; you are feeling strong and can think to yourself that you are returning to the finish line. You covered the course twice, and you will do it again. Go hit that gong.

Knocking off the next 5 to 6 miles, you continue to motivate yourself, "Keep moving." "Relentless forward progress." If it helps, break up the course mentally. Run aid station to aid station. Landmark to landmark.

If you find that you need to adjust your race strategy, do so. Practice acceptance. You have more than one race strategy and goal. Also, practice gratitude.

You are approaching aid station 2. What do you need? Do you need to rehydrate? Do you need electrolytes? Are you feeling hungry? Do you need lubrication? To get a rock out of your shoe? Take what you need.

Continuing to press on, you approach the rolling hills resourcefully.

If your pace slows down, you remain calm, knowing that you will continue to press towards the finish line. "Every step forward is a step closer to getting that award."

Leaving aid station 2, you are closing in on being halfway through the final loop.

Before reaching aid station 3, check-in with yourself to see what you need. As the volunteers ask how they can help, let them know. The next aid station is unmanned.

After getting what you need, you shake off any tiredness that you may be feeling. You are fueled and can keep trekking. Remind yourself that you are earning your finish and have one aid station to go.

Dig deep, as needed.

If you need to, run tree to tree or rock to rock, and then hike. All you need to do is to keep moving forward and to keep working hard. You are doing amazing.

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If you are in the pain cave, do some work.

You are closer to earning your award. Imagine yourself receiving it and holding it. Imagine the people who will be with you at the finish.

Once you have gone through aid station 4 for the final time, you will be running on pavement to the finish.

It is the home stretch!

You can reach the finish; you have worked so hard to get to this point. Your energy increases, you are doing it.

All your strength, possibilities, and determination fill your mind and body. Feel this positive energy fill your body.

Passing through the park and beach area, spectators are rooting for you. Happiness and gratitude also fill your body.

Winding your way down the road, there are more people congratulating you and clapping as you near the finish.

You can now see the finish line in the distance. Notice the details, what else can you see in the distance around the finish? Will anybody be waiting for you to congratulate you?

You feel emotions of accomplishment and excitement.

It is time to get to that timing mat.

The energy is swelling, as you feel it increase with every step towards the finish. The energy is expanding.

You continue to use your strength, possibilities, and determination as you surge towards the timing mat. You are strong, powerful, keep moving.

Notice the details of the finish line, volunteers, and spectators. The cheering and music. The clapping, cow bell, smiling, and waving.

You finish!

You receive congratulations from the race director and your award.

This moment is what you are capable of, it's your potential. All the work that you are doing has led you to right here. Absorb that energy. You achieved something great.

Bring up to your mind any dreams and aspirations that you have for that event. Visualize your hopes.

Think about what it feels like to accomplish your goal and all the hard work that you have done.

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Mentally repeat to yourself that you can achieve your goals. You have the potential. Repeat to yourself in your head or out loud, “you are a capable person.” “You have unlocked your strength.” “You can feel the positive energy.”

Breathe in and out. When you are ready, you may open your eyes. Notice that the positive energy is still there. Hold onto it, now and during the event.

You have earned it.

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Talks and workshops for trail and ultrarunners

I lead a workshop for trail and ultra runners called **The Power of Mindfulness in Trail Running. THE POWER IS WITHIN YOURSELF.**

The workshop is packed with high quality information on what mindfulness is, who it benefits, what the benefits are, practicing it at home, and using it for trail racing.

For more details, please visit:

<https://finishstrongermindsetcoaching.com/talks-workshops/>

Learn more and follow me

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