

The Eternal Athlete Framework™



NATIONAL SPORTS ASSOCIATION OF
**WELLNESS &
MENTAL FITNESS**

WWW.NSAWMF.ORG



Our Guide to the 6 Pillars
of Athlete Mental
Fitness and Wellness
Development

Eternal Athlete Framework

Fostering Peak Performance

Through

Mental Fitness and Wellness

The way we approach mental fitness in sports needs to change, and no one knows this better than the founders of the NSAWMF. From D1 athletics, to the NFL, to corporate boardrooms, to military service, they have carried the weight of performance and learned that mental fitness, not physical talent, fuels lasting success.

The NSAWMF's mission is to make mental fitness a core pillar of athlete development and equip athletes, coaches, parents, and communities with the tools and education to support growth, resilience, and lifelong strength.

Central to that mission is the Eternal Athlete Framework—a science-backed model that helps athletes thrive both in sport and in life. Explore the 6 Pillars of the Eternal Athlete Framework to see how they can power peak performance and sustained well-being.

67% of female athletes and 42% of male athletes wished their coaches talked more about wellness topics.

NCAA Student-Athlete Health & Wellness Study, 2023

Build a mindset and identity that transcends the game.

The Eternal Athlete sees their physical ability as just one chapter in a lifelong pursuit of excellence—mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically. They carry forward the discipline, resilience, and drive forged in sport to every area of life.

The Eternal Athlete doesn't rise alone. Behind every lifelong competitor is a network of support—parents who nurture, coaches who guide, and institutions that believe in more than stats. This guide helps build not just better athletes, but stronger humans.



The Eternal Athlete Pillars

"Greatness starts in
the mind."

Sammy Knight Jr., Chief Member
Relations and Advocacy Officer, NSAWMF



1. Mental Fitness

2. Wellness

3. Competitive
Resilience

4. Performance
Perception

5. Moments That
Matter

6. Social &
Community
Responsibility

1. Mental Fitness

What It Is:

The mind's ability to help the body perform.

Why It Matters:

Mental fitness is the essential practice of strengthening the mind to improve performance. It helps defend against stress, foster positive thoughts, build self-confidence, and enhance clarity, enabling individuals to reach higher levels of achievement.

What We Believe:

At NSAWMF, we believe the mind enables the body. Nothing happens in the body that does not happen in the mind first. The body can perform at its peak when the mind is healthy and focused. This interconnectedness makes mental fitness the driving force behind physical performance.

Among high school athletes, a staggering 91% experienced stress due to sports, with 58% rating it as moderate to extreme.

Journal of Adolescent Health Study on High School Athletes, 2018.



“Mental fitness is the routine effort to improve performance on and off the field by...”



**Optimizing Brain
Function and Clarity**



**The Mind Enabling the
Body to Perform**



**Defending against
shocks and stresses**



**Bolstering Identity and self
confidence**

Dr Jeremiah Pearcey, NSAWMF Chief Sport and Performance Psychologist

2. Wellness

What It Is:

The discipline and ability to evaluate your environment and manage your reactions to improve the impact on your health and life.



Essential Factors:

Spirituality: What we believe in

Intimacy and Relationships: How we connect with others

Sleep: How easily we can enter a restful state

Psychology: How we think and how our thoughts shape our behavior

Physiology: How well our body functions and recovers

Safety and Protection: Our sense of security in our everyday environment

Nutrition and Gut Health: The foods and liquids we consume and their impact on our overall wellness

Environment: The quality of life where we live, including financial stability, water quality, local culture, and social support

What We Believe:

At NSAWMF, we believe **practicing daily habits that nurture the mind, body, and spirit** is essential for achieving peak performance. Wellness goes beyond physical health—it's about evaluating and optimizing all aspects of life, from our relationships and environment to our thoughts and beliefs. When we nurture each of these areas, we create the conditions for mental fitness to flourish.



Wellness is Part of Winning

MENTAL HEALTH TRENDS IN FEMALE NCAA ATHLETES (2023)

MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS

38% felt mentally exhausted “constantly or almost every day”

35% felt overwhelmed daily

28% showed clinically significant anxiety symptoms

HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOR

More likely to seek support than males

- Mental health professionals & athletic trainers
- Fear of failure and letting others down
- Injury recovery and return-to-play expectations

SUPPORT GAPS

Fewer than **55%** agreed coaches support mental health

Around **50%** felt comfortable talking with a coach

3. Competitive Resilience

What It Is:

Competitive resilience is the mind's ability to Recover, Observe, Adapt, and Rise above life's shocks and stresses. It involves the mental, emotional, physical, spiritual, and social strength to bounce back and perform under pressure.



Why It Matters:

Having resilience leads to not only athletic success but also personal growth. Athletes with competitive resilience can rise above challenges, adapt to uncertainty, and achieve sustained success in their careers and lives.

A 2021 study found that mental toughness and grit explained 32.4% of the variance in resilience among student-athletes.

Cowden & Meyer-Weitz, 2021

What We Believe:

At NSAWMF, we believe competitive resilience is essential to mental fitness. It involves the capacity to withstand and recover from the inevitable challenges athletes face in competition and life. True resilience is built through **adaptability, accountability, and the support of strong social bonds.**

4. Moments that Matter

What Are They:

Moments that Matter are pivotal points in life that require purpose-driven behavioral adaptation to promote health and happiness. For athletes, these pivotal points are particularly significant as they often coincide with major life changes, such as moving to a new city, transitioning from high school to college, dealing with injuries, or even pregnancy. These moments can either disrupt stability or propel you toward greatness.

Why It Matters:

According to the Generalized Unsafety Theory of Stress, uncertainty triggers psychological stress, causing the mind to ruminate on unanswered questions. For athletes, this uncertainty can cascade into other areas of life, from academics to personal relationships, impacting their mental fitness and overall well-being.



What We believe:

At NSAWMF, we believe these moments that matter shape personal growth and resilience, making intentional adaptation essential for long-term well-being and success. **By recognizing the significance of these moments, athletes can take control of their journey and turn challenges into opportunities for development.**

Moments That Shape The Journey



**“IT WAS THE FIGHT BEFORE
THE FIGHT THAT MADE ME A
CHAMPION”**

MUHAMMAD ALI

5. Performance Perception

What It Is:

Performance Perception is the ability to evaluate and accept your end-game performance versus what you originally envisioned. This post-game analysis helps athletes identify strengths and weaknesses, promoting self-awareness and guiding future improvement.



Why It Matters:

Studies in sports psychology have shown that athletes often experience a “negativity bias,” where they focus on what went wrong more than what went right. With the right mental fitness tools, athletes can train their minds to silence overly critical thoughts from themselves and others, adopting a more balanced perspective that leads to improved performance and a healthier self-perception.

What We Believe:

At NSAWMF, we believe that enhanced mental fitness improves performance perception, enabling athletes to assess their efforts with greater clarity. **The ability to accept and reflect on outcomes versus expectations is essential for growth, resilience, and continuous improvement.**

6. Community and Social Responsibility

What It Is:

Social and community responsibility involves a shared commitment among institutions, partners, sponsors, and financial beneficiaries to foster and lead ethical social and business practices that improve lives and strengthen communities.



Why It Matters:

When stakeholders prioritize athletes' wellness, they promote ethical practices, strengthen their reputations, and contribute to the development of the “Eternal Athlete.”] These organizations are not just passive participants—they are leaders in advancing ethical standards and advocating for environments where athletes can thrive.

What We Believe:

At NSAWMF, we believe **governing institutions and athletic programs have a duty to protect and support the holistic development of student-athletes** by providing the mental, physical, and emotional resources necessary for their growth. **Corporate partners and financial beneficiaries** play an equally important role, as their investment in mental fitness initiatives not only safeguards athletes but also demonstrates their commitment to social responsibility.



10-Point Checklist: Becoming an Eternal Athlete

Commit to Mental Fitness

Build self-awareness, emotional regulation, and focus through regular mindset training.

Train with Purpose, Not Just Intensity

Every workout should align with your long-term goals and growth, not just short-term wins.

Fuel the Body to Power the Mind

Prioritize sleep, nutrition, and hydration to sustain both physical and cognitive performance.

Reflect on Setbacks, Don't Just Recover

Turn failures into fuel – analyze, learn, and adjust.

Lead in the Locker Room and Life

Practice character, integrity, and care in every environment you enter.

Balance Identity Beyond the Game

Cultivate passions, skills, and relationships outside your sport to grow as a whole person.

Use Pressure as a Teacher

View high-stakes moments as opportunities to rise, not to retreat.

Surround Yourself with Growth-Minded People

Seek mentors, coaches, and peers who challenge and support your evolution.

Coaching Tips to Support Eternal Athletes

Model Mental Fitness in Action

Normalize mindset training and show how athletes can refocus under pressure. Practice self-awareness —athletes mirror what they see.

Create Purposeful Practice Environments

Design drills and sessions that reflect game situations and long-term development, not just winning today.

Prioritize Recovery and Balance

Build rest, reflection, and flexibility into the training plan. Encourage athletes to listen to their bodies and protect their energy.

Talk Through Setbacks—Don't Just Move On

After losses or mistakes, lead discussions that help athletes process what happened and reset their focus.

Develop the Person, Not Just the Player

Support athletes in exploring identity, values, and goals beyond sport. Ask questions that show you care about who they are, not just what they do

Curate a Culture of Growth and Belonging

Surround athletes with mentors, guest speakers, and peer leaders who reinforce resilience and leadership.



Parent Tips to Support Eternal Athletes

Celebrate Effort Over Outcome

Praise persistence, discipline, and improvement-- not just wins or stats. This builds intrinsic motivation and resilience.

Model Mental Wellness at Home

Normalize conversations about stress, rest, and mindset. Show your athlete that mental health is a source of strength, not a secret.

Keep Identity Bigger Than the Sport

Help your child develop interest and confidence outside of competition. They're a whole person, not just an athlete.

Be a Steady Voice

Focus post-game conversations on learning and support, not just critique.

Encourage Rest and Recovery

Advocate for sleep, mental breaks, and downtime. Growth happens in recovery, not just reps.

Parent Tips to Support Eternal Athletes

Make Mental Fitness a Core Component of Athlete Development

Integrate mindset, resilience, and mental health training into strength and conditioning, coaching, and athlete onboarding.

Train and Empower Staff to Recognize Mental Health Needs

Provide ongoing education for coaches, trainers, faculty, and advisors to identify and appropriately respond to athlete stress, burnout, or emotional red flags.

Create Clear Access to Support Resources

Ensure student-athletes know where and how to access counseling, mental performance coaching, or peer support – especially during high-pressure times.

Reward Character and Leadership, Not Just Stats

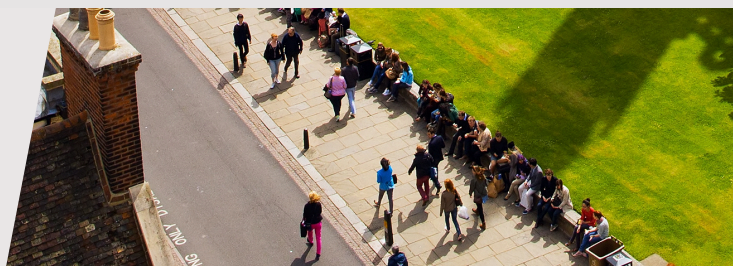
Celebrate and incentivize behaviors like accountability, empathy, perseverance, and team leadership with awards, scholarships, and evaluations.

Protect Space for Rest, Identity, and Recovery

Support policies that give athletes autonomy over their time, including breaks, academic flexibility, and opportunities to explore passions beyond sport.

Champion a Culture That Trains the Mind and the Body

Use leadership platforms to promote mental fitness as essential, not optional.



Refer a Friend and Donate

Refer a friend to join the NSAWMF community for free, or make a donation today and help champion mental wellness, unlocking peak performance for athletes everywhere.

About the NSAWMF

The NSAWMF is a non-profit organization that offers a free membership association and the Eternal Athlete Framework to members of the sports community. The NSAWMF's goal is , which give athletes, coaches, families, and institutions the mental fitness tools and resources to stay focused, confident, and composed, no matter the pressure.

Sources

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