

SUMMER🕒CHALLENGE

Welcome to Your Meantime Valley

Carla Harris calls the space
between what was and what comes next
the **meantime valley**.

For athletes, summer can be **exactly** that!
The regular season slows practices down,
your schedule opens up and
the next season has not started yet.

This is time is an **ideal** space to build something you usually only pay attention to
when pressure returns: **your mental resilience**.

Think of this challenge as **Mental Resilience DIY**.

You will experiment with breathing, visualisation, journaling, movement, music and
reflection.

This isn't a program you follow week by week. It's a toolkit.
Some of it will fit you, some won't — and that's expected, not a failure.

Not to fix yourself or complete everything perfectly, but to discover what works for you.

- 🕒 Stay curious.
- 🕒 Try things.
- 🕒 Notice what happens.
- 🕒 Keep what works.
- 🕒 Leave the rest.

Because the better you understand yourself as a human being,
the more choice and you have as an athlete.

Your season may be on pause.
Your development doesn't have to be.

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Set up

Two parts to this kit:

PART 1

(page 3)

The basics

what mental resilience actually is, in plain language. Read this once, it's the basics they do not change.

PART 2

(page 7)

The tools

a menu of things you can try.
Pick a few.
Test them now, while nothing's on the line,
so you already know what works for you once the season starts.

Let's go!
Have fun!

I had making it! 😊

Let me know what you think of it!

Lots of Love

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PART 1 – THE BASICS

Mental Resilience — The Basics

What it actually is not

Mental resilience is not staying positive.
It's not pushing through no matter what.
It's not being able to switch off what you feel.

What it actually is

Mental resilience is staying connected to yourself when things get hard
— noticing* what's happening inside you without letting it run the show.

That's it.

It's not about becoming someone who never freezes, never overthinks, never feels nervous.
Every human does, every athlete.

Mental resilience is being able to notice what happens,
understand it a little,
and still choose what you do next.

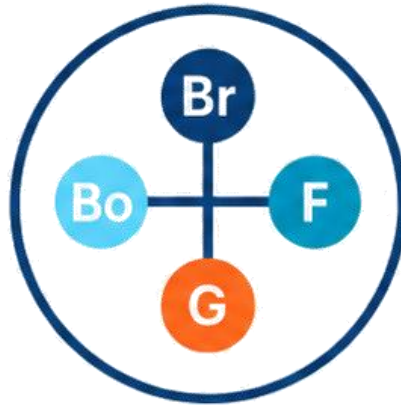
** noticing means: looking at it from curiosity and without judgement.*

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Your Inner Team the four things you're always working with

You – as a human – have a system of four sources of information running:

- ∞ at the same time,
- ∞ all day,
- ∞ every training,
- ∞ every game:



Your inner team

Your brain 	it produces thoughts. Constantly. Some useful, some not.
Your body 	it gives you sensations. Tight shoulders, a fast heartbeat, a heavy feeling in your legs, but also a loose, ready feeling before a good session, warmth in your chest, that switched-on buzz right before you perform well.
Your feelings 	nervous, frustrated, flat, but also fired up, calm and locked in, or just genuinely happy to be out there.
Your gut 	the thing you just <i>know</i> , before you can explain why.

Disclaimer (IMPORTANT!):

None of these are "you."

You're the one who notices all four.

As a human: that's your biggest advantage.

You get to look at what's happening instead of just being stuck inside it.

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The reframe that changes everything

When something shows up

- ② you freeze before a big moment,
- ② you go quiet after a mistake,
- ② you can't stop replaying something that happened three plays ago
- ② you started breathing at a high frequency in the chest area
- ② you tell yourself that you do not belong at this elite level

The most automatic question is:

"What's wrong with me?"

But that question doesn't help.

It just makes you feel worse about something you didn't do or choose.

Try this instead:

"Every reaction has a job. What might this one's job be?"

- ② Freezing has a job.
- ② Going quiet has a job.
- ② Overthinking has a job.
- ② Heavily breathing has a job.

None of them showed up randomly — at some point, they helped you.

- ② Maybe overthinking once helped you avoid a mistake.
- ② Maybe going quiet once kept you out of trouble.

Your system isn't broken. It's doing something.

Your job is **not** to shut it down — it's to get **curious** about what it's doing.

Once you ask that question instead of "what's wrong with me,"
you're not fighting yourself anymore.

You're just watching, with curiosity.
And that changes what happens next.

And will save you energy and time in the end!

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The way you actually deal with it

When you catch yourself in a pattern — before a game, after a mistake, mid-training — ask:

"What do I actually feel?"

Describe it: "it feels heavy in my stomach" "it feels like a pinch" "it feels like fog in my chest."

Name it: "I feel sadness" "it feels like my face is on fire" "it feels like my head is in an overload." "I have the thought that I am not good enough."

Stay with it: focus on the area in your body where you feel it. Let it do its thing: if it is sadness: keep repeating (inner voice) "I feel sadness" as long as it is still there.

Stay away from rational questions like "what am I afraid of." Or "what's wrong with me."

Just: stay with it with curiosity.

Follow with the question: "what is this trying to do?"

Write down whatever comes up. There's no wrong answer. You're not solving it — you're just getting a little more familiar with your own system.

Fact vs. story

One more tool, and it's one of the most useful ones there is.

A **fact** is what actually happened.

A **story** is what your mind makes of it.

Fact:	You missed the shot.
Story:	"I always choke when it matters."

Fact:	The coach didn't say anything to you after training.
Story:	"He's disappointed in me."

The story feels just as real as the fact — but it isn't the fact.

Most of the pressure you feel comes from the story, not the fact itself.

Try this:

Next time something happens that gets to you, write down the fact in one line.

Then write down the story your mind added.

Just seeing them separated on paper already does something.

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A curiosity exercise to experiment with

DH: dominant hand: with which hand do you write? That is your dominant hand.

NDH: non-dominant hand: if you write with your righthand: your left hand is your non-dominant hand. If you write with your left hand, it is your right hand.

Next time you feel sad, down because of a fact:

- 1) Use your NDH and write how it felt to experience this (*take ± 5 min.*)
- 2) Reply to this text with your DH (*take ± 5 min.*)
- 3) Analyze the answer to the feeling: so 2) to 1):
is it nice, strict, helping, supportive or not? (*take ± 2 min.*)
- 4) Use your NDH and write down what you needed to feel better and safe (*take ± 5 min.*)
- 5) Analyze the answer 4). This is the self-talk you actually need when this situation occurs.

Writing with your NDH makes you go towards your **core**: the more instinctive, less-filtered part of you.

Try this

Pick one moment this week — training, a game, or just daily life — where you catch a pattern showing up.

Freezing, overthinking, going quiet, being hard(er) on yourself than you'd ever be on a teammate.

Don't try to stop it.

Just go along with it.

By asking yourself:

“What do I actually feel?”

“Where do I feel this?”

“What thoughts go through my head?”

As soon as you get the chance: write down whatever comes up.

No judgment. Just curiosity..

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PART 2 – THE TOOLS

Mental Resilience — Tools menu

How to use

Pick what fits.

Test what feels interesting

Skip what doesn't.

Test a few over summer:

so you already know what works before the season starts.

Do not use it in a performance style: no pushing through no matter what.

Keep in mind: it's not about being able to switch off what you feel.



Breathing



Journaling



Visualizing



Movement



Music



**Calm your
body**



**Routines to
copy**



Connection



Play

At the end (from page 26)

You will find something on intentions and goals, possible drafts of a daily schedule and tips on books and podcasts that inspire(d) me.

***“Whether you think you can
or you think you cannot.
You’re right” – Henry Ford***

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TOOL 1 – Breathing

Why it works

Your breath is the one thing your body does automatically — and the one thing you can also take over on purpose. This is unique: you can't consciously slow your heart rate or tell your stomach to digest faster, but you can control your breath any time you want.

That gives you two things

It gives your brain something to do.

Your brain can only focus hard on one thing at a time. When you put your attention on your breath, there's less room left for whatever was spinning in your head or calling attention somewhere in your body.

It tells your body it's safe.

A slow, steady breath is a signal for your body. Your body picks up on it and starts to calm down with it — heart rate drops, muscles loosen, your head gets a bit clearer.

You don't have to believe it or force it. It just works, the same way a tight jaw is a signal that you're wound up.

The check

Put one hand on your chest, one on your belly. Breathe normally.

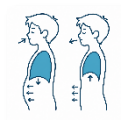
If the hand on your chest moves more than the one on your belly, you're breathing shallow — from the top. Try sending the breath lower instead: in through your nose, belly pushes out; breathe out, belly comes back in. That's it. That's the "reset" position for everything below.

A few to try

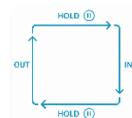
Pick one or two, try and test them this summer, keep what feels good.

Belly breathing — in through your nose, belly rises. Out slowly, belly falls.

Simple, good for winding down before sleep or after a hard session.



Box breathing — in for 4, hold for 4, out for 4, hold for 4. Used by elite athletes and Navy SEALs for a reason — it's fast, structured, good right before something high-pressure.



The sigh — breathe in deep, hold for one second, breathe out loud enough to hear it — like a real sigh. Repeat 5 times. Good for right after something goes wrong and you need a fast reset, not a long one.



Longer exhale — breathe in normally, breathe out slower than you breathed in. Even just making your exhale a bit longer than your inhale does most of the calming work on its own.



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Try this

- 1) Pick one of these.
- 2) Use it once a day this week: same time each day.
- 3) Set timer on your phone: start with 90 seconds.
- 4) Somewhere quiet: no distractions.

No pressure yet.

You're not training for a moment.

You're finding out which one is actually yours, so it's already familiar when you need it.

“I think an athletes mind is one of the unique places on earth, because they deal with extremes every day: the toolkits they have is one of the most versatile toolkits.” – Jay Shetty



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TOOL 2 – Journaling

Why it works

Thoughts feel enormous when they're only in your head. Or the amount of thoughts can overwhelm.

The same thought, once on paper, gets smaller — not because it's less serious, but because you're no longer inside it.

You're looking at it instead of living inside it.

It can reduce stress and improve mental clarity.

Writing also slows you down.

Your brain can spiral in half a second. Your hand can't write nearly that fast.

That gap — between how quick a thought is and how slow writing is — is where you actually get a say in what happens next.

None of this requires you to be a "writer."

Nobody is reading this (sometimes not even you).

It doesn't need to make sense to anyone but you (or not even that).

Try this

How to actually do it.

Pick up a pen and a notebook or any piece of paper.

It can help

- to set a timer — even 3 minutes counts or
- commit to writing 3 pages.

Just keep writing.

If you don't know what to write, write that: *"I have to write and I don't know what to write."*

Keep going. Something else will show up. It almost always does.

Do it daily if you can or every other day if that's more realistic. E.g.: Write on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Consistency matters more than length.

A few to try

Prompts to fall back on:

Some days you'll have plenty to say. Other days, pick some of these.

- ② How do I want to feel today?
- ② What are my intentions for today (no more than 3)?
- ② How is my body feeling?
- ② How is my mind feeling?



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- 🕒 What is my mood today?
- 🕒 What do I want to focus on today?
- 🕒 What do I want to let go of today?
- 🕒 What is not working anymore?
- 🕒 What can I stop doing?
- 🕒 What's one thing that went well recently, even small?
- 🕒 What's a pattern I noticed in myself this week?
- 🕒 What could I have done differently?
- 🕒 What do I wish I had not done today?
- 🕒 What am I avoiding writing about right now?
- 🕒 What is good right now?
- 🕒 What are 3–5 things I am **grateful*** for?
Try not to repeat the same as the last time you jotted them down.

Don't use all of them. Pick a few and go.

***Gratitude** = very powerful; not only helps organize your thoughts but also shifts your focus toward positive experiences. Research shows that writing regularly about things you're grateful for can increase happiness, linked to better mood and sleep.

It's a simple practice: write down a few specific things you're thankful for. Not vague ideas like "my health," but details—"how calm I felt on my way to practice this morning," or "the barista that drew a heart in my latte."

When we focus on gratitude, we soothe our stress response. We send the signal: "You're safe."

Gratitude can sometimes feel like **pressure**. Like we're supposed to stay positive even when things are hard. But it isn't about ignoring what's real.

It isn't about skipping over pain—it's about noticing what else is true alongside it. It's not a way to avoid grief or frustration or covering up or moving on too quickly. Instead, it's a way of be aware of what matters, what's still good, even in the midst of struggle.

Gratitude helps us hold more than one thing at a time. It lets us realize the sadness and still feel the effect of a kind word, the sunshine or a quiet moment. It allows space for both anger and awe, both frustration and beauty.

Cues:

Just write. Don't reread it. Don't edit it. Just notice how it feels to get it out of your head and onto paper — that feeling is the whole point.



TOOL 3 – Visualizing

Why it works

Your brain doesn't fully separate a vividly imagined moment from a real one. When you picture yourself doing something in detail: the actual feeling in your body, what your 5 senses experience — your brain runs the same pathways it would use if you were really experiencing it.

That's why athletes who visualize well feel calmer. They've already "been there" before they arrive. The moment isn't a total unknown anymore.

Research shows that mental imagery stimulates the same brain regions as physical practice. It strengthens neural pathways, it improves muscle coordination and reduces competition anxiety.

It only works if it's specific. "See yourself succeeding" is too vague to do anything. The detail is the part that matters.

How to actually do it

- 1) Find a quiet few minutes — lying down, sitting, right before sleep, right after you wake up (later on: you can practice it before your game).
- 2) set a timer: start with 3 minutes (work towards max. 10 (after it can become daydreaming)
- 3) Close your eyes if that's comfortable.

Picture the moment in as much detail as you can:

- ② What do you see, exactly? The field, the court, the water, the room.
- ② What do you hear? Crowd, silence, shoes, bouncing ball, your own breathing, a whistle.
- ② What do you smell? Rubber, sweat, water, air, chalk, ball, wood, plastic, food.
- ② What do you feel on your skin? Does it feel cold/warm? A wind or breeze, your breath?
- ② What do you feel in your body? How are your feet (tucked in shoes, socks? Bare on the floor/matt, how about your hands (sweaty, dry, tight, in a fist)?, your shoulders, jaw?
- ② What's the feeling — focused, loose, locked in, nervous?
- ② Even what you taste: saliva, food, flavor of a drink, water.

Don't rush it. A rushed visualization is just a thought. A slow one is closer to a rehearsal.

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Three to try, one per day

Options to include, use these across three days:

Day 1 — You as the athlete you're building toward. Not a fantasy version, not "the best in the world" — just a clear, specific picture of yourself performing well, doing what you actually do, at your best. In short: picture your future self.

Day 2 — The unglamorous part. Picture yourself doing the reps nobody sees. Or picture a mistake happening — and picture yourself recovering from it, not being wrecked by it. This is the one people skip. It's also the one that matters most, because the season will absolutely include mistakes (and reps), and this is where you practice what comes after one.

Day 3 — The moment itself. Before a game, in the moments right before it starts. Picture yourself feeling in control, confident — not without unhealthy heavy nerves, but knowing your nerves and knowing what you do with them.

Try this

Pick one of the three above and spend 3–5 minutes with it today.

If it feels awkward at first, that's normal — it gets easier with repetition, same as anything else you practice.

Golden rules on Visualizing

- ② Build a detailed mental picture.
- ② Participate with all five senses.
- ② Set clear performance goals.
- ② Practice visualization daily.
- ② Combine mental and physical training.
- ② Build up in minutes: work towards max. 10 minutes per scenario* (after it can become daydreaming).

*so you can do the 3 scenarios and do a total of 30 minutes (3x 10), that is not a problem.

Cue:

Even possible to do right before the game in the toilet or locker room.

***"There is only you and your mindset."* – Kylian Mbappé**

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TOOL 4 – Movement

Why it works

Your head can spiral. Your body can't spiral in the same way — it's always just doing whatever it's doing, right now, in this step, this stroke, this stride.

That makes movement one of the fastest ways to get out of your head, without needing to think your way out.

What it actually is not

This isn't training.

It's not about getting better at your sport.

What it actually is

It's the opposite — movement that has

- no goal,
- no score,
- nobody watching,
- nothing to improve.

That's exactly what makes it useful.

How to actually do it

Pick something that moves your body but isn't your sport, or isn't sport at all:

- ② A walk — doesn't need to be long, 15 minutes is plenty
- ② A swim, if that's not your primary sport
- ② A bike ride with nowhere specific to be and only if it's not your primary sport
- ② Even just moving around your room or garden if that's all you've got today

The No's

- No phone,
- No headphones,
- No-one else,
- No plan.

The point isn't the distance or the effort.

It's giving your body something to do while your head gets a break from being in charge.



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Try this

Go for a 15-minute walk today — alone, no phone, no music.

If your head starts running through thoughts, let it.

You're not trying to think about nothing.

You're just giving your body the lead for a bit.

It will feel uncomfortable. This is logical, this is new to you.

It is a training of your body to do something without a distraction.

Compare it to when you are under the shower and clarity shows up and ideas come to you.

Trendy name: **rawdogg**ing boredom.

Notice how it feels at the beginning and notice how it changes in a week or by the end of the summer.

Doing this daily is best, but (again) consistency matters more than length.

So a 15 minute walk on Mondays, Wednesday and Fridays: is a great starting point!

***“Everyone is jealous of what you’ve got,
no one is jealous of how you got it.” – Jimmy Carr***

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TOOL 5 – Music

Why it works

Music changes your state fast — faster than almost anything else on this list.
Music can influence far more than your mood.

It activates brain areas involved in emotion, reward, attention and memory.

It can change your energy, affect how intensely you experience a moment and even influence how your body responds.

Songs with lyrics may have an especially strong effect because the words add meaning, memories and associations.

That means music can help you:

- ② build energy before practice or competition;
- ② calm your system after pressure;
- ② shift your focus after a mistake;
- ② reconnect with confidence or enjoyment;
- ② process emotions that are difficult to put into words;
- ② feel connected to teammates or to a specific moment in your career.

Athletes already use this instinctively — the pre-game playlist isn't random.

So use music in more than one way (as background sound) and experience what it can actually do for you.

The trick is knowing which music has which job.

The song that gets you fired up before a run is the wrong song for winding down afterward.

Also true: a song that makes one athlete feel powerful may make another athlete too tense or overstimulated.

Music can also distract you from what you are feeling instead of helping you regulate it.



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Try this

Build several playlist, each with a specific job:

- 🕒 **To activate** — before training, before & during a run, when you need energy you don't have yet or want to keep
- 🕒 **To calm** — winding down, journaling, before sleep
- 🕒 **To focus** — blocking out noise, getting into a task, no distraction

Notice which songs actually do the job, not just which ones you like.

A song can be a favorite and still be the wrong one for right before a game.

Build a short playlist for it this week, even just 5 songs.

Use them on purpose, for that job only.

Notice if the songs actually do what you expected them to do.

Stay curious: so don't check:

“Is this a motivating song?”

But check:

“Does this song motivate me?”

Notice what happens to your breathing, body tension, thoughts and energy when you listen. Does the music bring you closer to the state you need, or further away from it?

Use music intentionally, not automatically.

Adjust as you go, remove songs that do not do it and add songs you hear and bring you in the state you want.

Optional

You can make additional playlists, e.g.:

- 🕒 **To regulate** — get frustration out of your system
- 🕒 **To express** — to deeply go through a gloomy state
- 🕒 **To boost** — happy songs to boost your mood into higher state
- 🕒 **To encourage** — songs to supersize your confidence

Music is the soundtrack of your life. – Dick Clark



TOOL 6 – Calm Your Body

Why it works

Your brain doesn't actually know if you're safe or not — it guesses, based on signals it gets from your body.

Fast breathing, a tight jaw, narrowed focus: your brain reads those as "something's wrong," and turns the alarm up further.

Here's the trick: it works the other way too.

You can deliberately send your body calm signals:

Slow breath, relaxed eyes, a loose jaw — even before you feel calm.

Your brain reads those signals the same way it reads the panicked ones.

It doesn't question if it's fake.

It just responds: *okay, apparently we're safe*, and the alarm starts turning back down.

You're not thinking your way calm. You're feeding your brain evidence, on purpose, that there's nothing to worry about right now.

Mind you: this isn't about making the nerves disappear.

Nerves before something that matters are normal, even useful.

This is for when it has passed that stage of 'healthy nerves' — when it's in the way instead of helping.

A few to try

5-4-3-2-1 — name 5 things you can see, 4 you can feel, 3 you can hear, 2 you can smell, 1 you can taste.

You don't need to finish the list — stop as soon as you notice you've settled back into your calm self.

Wide eyes — let your gaze go soft and wide, taking in the edges of your vision instead of staring at one point. Turn a tunnel vision (which can be a danger signal to your brain) into a wide, relaxed field of view which tells the opposite: nothing's coming, it's safe to relax.

4 in, 5 out — breathe in through your nose for a count of 4, out through your nose for a count of 5. The longer exhale is doing most of the work here.

The head press — place your hands behind your head, push your head gently back against them without actually moving your head.

Keep your head facing forward but let your eyes look left, and hold.

Wait for it — most people feel an urge to yawn (let it happen) or a wave of relaxation within 30-60 seconds.

Go to your feet — if you're stuck very much in your head, go to the complete opposite end of your body.

How do your feet actually feel — warm or cold, tight or loose, tired or energized?

Wiggle your toes. Roll onto your heels, then the outsides of your feet, then your toes, then

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the insides.

Simple, but it pulls your attention all the way out of your head and into something concrete.

Shake it out — literally shake your hands, arms, legs for 10–15 seconds, like flicking water off.

Sounds silly, works well — it's a fast way to release tension your body is holding without you noticing.

Tense and release — squeeze a muscle group hard for 5 seconds:

- 🕒 Make your hands into fists
- 🕒 Pull your shoulders towards your ears
- 🕒 Squeeze your jaws by closing your mouth tight
- 🕒 Curl your toes
- 🕒 Pull in your belly button
- 🕒 Curl your arms

Then let go completely. The release is where the calm comes. Do a minimum of 5 groups. Also great to do in bed if you find it difficult to fall asleep

Hum or sing something — low, steady humming for 20–30 seconds.
Feels strange the first time, does something real to how wound up you feel.

Butterfly taps — cross your arms and place your hands on your chest; just below the collar bone (so left hand is on right chest and right hand on left side) tap your chest lightly for about 30 seconds.

Try this

Pick one or two of these and try it during the week: when you're not even that wound up. just to know how it feels, which calms you down and which feels pleasant?
Test ride them before you actually need it under pressure after the summer.

“Keep the main thing the main thing.” – Stephen R. Covey

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TOOL 7 – Routines to copy

Why it works

A routine is a signal to yourself.

When you do the same small sequence before something that matters, your body and brain learn what it means: *this* is the moment we're switching into.

Over time, the routine itself starts doing some of the calming and focusing work, just by being familiar.

You don't need to invent your own from scratch.

Try a few that other athletes actually use, see which one feels like it fits, then make it yours.

A few to try

- ② **Steph Curry — smile before you shoot.** He smiles before free throws, on purpose, to trick his body into relaxing.
- ② **Jahdae Barron — commit to the process, not the outcome.** Each morning, ask yourself: can I do the fundamentals at a high level without being emotionally attached to the result? The timeline isn't yours to control — trust it and keep doing the work.
- ② **Novak Djokovic — get bored on purpose.** No phone, no screen, no music, 10 minutes minimum. Your brain will crave input and then the craving drops — ride it out, and your mind starts wandering into ideas on its own.
- ② **Kobe Bryant — play to find out, not to win or avoid losing.** Both "I need to win" and "I can't afford to lose" load you with pressure. Instead ask: what can I figure out about myself today?
- ② **Tom Brady — train like it's already the final.** He gave every regular game the same effort as a championship, so when the real pressure moment came, it felt familiar instead of new.
- ② **Serena Williams — ask for the hard feedback.** She sought out honest critique from her coaches instead of waiting for it — mastery means staying a student.
- ② **Eileen Gu — assume there's something to learn here.** Every situation, every person you meet — if you're looking for something to learn, you'll find it.
- ② **Michael Phelps — rehearse what could go wrong.** He visualized problems in advance and how he'd respond. When his goggles flooded in Beijing, he'd already been there in his head.
- ② **The New York Knicks — next play.** Down big, they didn't react emotionally to what just happened. Stop replaying what you wish happened, accept what actually did, and focus only on what you can do right now.



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- ② **Russell Wilson — neutral beats positive.** Swap forced hype for plain facts: not "I'm going to win," but "I'm here. I've done this ten thousand times." Neutral removes the pressure that both fear and forced positivity carry.
- ② **Mo Gawdat — a biweekly date with his brain.** Pen and paper, ask your brain what's on its mind, keep writing until it runs out — usually inside half an hour.
- ② **Beyoncé — build who you're becoming.** Write down the name of your persona: a person you want or need to be. Describe in detail. What does this person do, eat, tells themselves, hours they sleep, practice. Add 5 non-negotiable values for these athlete you're building toward. Daily check: are you acting like that person, or has the old version slipped in?
- ② **The Seattle Seahawks — connect the task to the goal.** Not "I'm doing a drill" — "I'm building my best self." Same drill, different meaning.
- ② **Simone Biles — one breath, one word.** Not to relax — to give her brain a job so it stops interfering with a body that already knows what to do. Same breath, same length, every time. One plain, descriptive word — not motivational, just true: "smooth," "trust," "now."

Try this

Pick one of the above and try it exactly as written, once, even in a low-stakes moment — a normal training session, not a big game. You're not committing to it forever. You're just finding out if it fits.

“If you’re not in the arena getting your ass kicked, I’m not interested in your feedback” – Brené Brown



TOOL 8 – Connection

Why it works

Something changes the moment you say a thought out loud to someone else. It stops being a loop in your head and becomes a real thing, sitting between the two of you — not because the other person fixes it, but because you're no longer carrying it alone. You don't need advice, or even someone who fully understands your sport. You just need someone who'll listen.

That's not just a nice idea — humans are wired for it.
Real connection does more than just feel good:

It's a quick hit of energy. A short chat with someone — the cashier, a neighbor, anyone — gives your brain a small lift. It pulls you out of performance mode for a second and drops your stress right there.

It gives your brain a break. Elite sport lives rent free in your head. A real, face-to-face conversation forces you into the present moment — and that's exactly the kind of rest your brain needs to actually recover, not just switch tasks.

It reminds you that you're more than your sport. Talking to different people — not just teammates, not just about training — reminds you the world is bigger than the locker room. That matters most when sport isn't going well, because it protects your sense of who you are when the results don't.

How to actually do it

Start small. You don't need a deep conversation to get the benefit — you need a real one, even a short one.

Getting energy from small moments (low effort, start here)

- ② **The checkout challenge** — earbuds out at the till. Greet the person, make eye contact, ask how their day's going. Notice how a returned smile gives you something back, immediately.
- ② **The greeting routine** — at the club or training ground, consciously greet three people you'd normally walk past — the equipment manager, another athlete's parent, the person at the front desk.

Reaching out when things are tough (takes a bit more)

- ② **Call, don't text** — carrying something (an injury, a bad result)? Don't send a message. Call a teammate, or walk up to your coach and say: "I'm dealing with something, have you got five minutes?"
- ② **Talk it out in person** — instead of unpacking a bad training over WhatsApp, grab a teammate after you've showered and talk it through face to face.

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Growing who you talk to (a bit further out of your comfort zone)

- ② **The mix-up** — at lunch or in the canteen, sit next to someone you don't know that well. Just ask: "How'd your training go today?" "Anything exciting you are looking forward to?"
- ② **The compliment opener** — see someone do something good or something brave at the club? Wears something you like?
Walk over and say it to their face. It opens the door to an actual conversation, every time.

Try this

Pick one from the first group — the checkout challenge or the greeting routine — and do it once this week.

Low effort, low risk, and it's the fastest way to feel what this pillar is actually about.

“Doubt is such a strange thing. There will be times you succeed and times you fail. Wasting your time on whether you fail is pointless. Control what you can control and see what the outcome is” – Kobe Bryant

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TOOL 9 – Play

Why it works

Somewhere along the way, most athletes stop doing anything physical or creative that isn't tied to getting better.

Every rep has a purpose.

Every session gets tracked.

That's normal in elite sport — and it also means the part of you that just enjoys moving or making something, with zero outcome attached, quietly disappears.

Play brings that part back.

Not because it "recharges you for performance" — though it does — but because you're allowed to be more than an athlete working toward a result.

That matters on its own.

How to actually do it

Do something with no goal, no score, no one judging it, and no way to fail at it. It doesn't need to be sporty at all:

- ② Shoot around with no drill, no purpose, just because it's fun
- ② Play a pickup game that means nothing
- ② Draw, doodle, build, cook, knit, color, pick up clay, mess around with an instrument — anything creative with zero pressure attached
- ② Play a (board) game, physical or not, purely because it's fun

The only rule

If you catch yourself trying to get good at it, or trying to win, you've turned it back into performance.

Pick something else, or just let it be bad on purpose.

Try this

Do one genuinely pointless, fun thing this week — something with no outcome you're tracking. Notice how it feels to do something just because, with nothing to show for it afterward.

SUMMER CHALLENGE

A Day, Put Together

You don't need to do all nine tools every day — please don't!

That's not the point of a toolkit.

But if you want a starting shape for what a day could look like, here's one:

Wake-up

Before you get on your phone.

Use your phone only to set a timer

Lie still for a few minutes in silence.

Start with 2 minutes if 5 feels like too much.

Build up over the summer.

Visualization — 5 minutes

Right after, while you're still lying there:

Use your phone again only to set a timer.

- ⌚ **Day 1:** picture yourself as the athlete you're building toward
- ⌚ **Day 2:** picture the reps nobody sees, and picture yourself recovering from a mistake
- ⌚ **Day 3:** picture the moment right before it matters — in control, confident, knowing your nervousness and what you do with it.

During the day

Somewhere in the middle (set a daily alarm on your phone) — a 15-minute walk, no phone no music on purpose, before or after training.

Whatever fits that day. But make it a priority. Hack: Figure out in advance what distance is about a 15 minute walk, so you can actually leave your phone behind.

Evening

A few minutes of journaling before bed.

Doesn't need to be long — a prompt,

5 things you are grateful for.

Or just whatever's on your mind.

This is one shape, not THE shape.

Swap tools in and out. Experiment

Some days you'll only manage one of these.

Still counts.

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Goals & Intentions

Why small goals, not big ones

A goal like "get better this season" feels motivating for about a day. Then it's too vague to act on, too big to know if you're actually making progress, and easy to quietly drop.

A goal only becomes real once you can answer:

- ② What does this look like next week?
- ② Split into smaller steps
- ② Checked regularly
- ② A goal stops being a wish and starts being something you're actually building.

Without that, even a good goal stays stuck as an idea in your head — same category as a thought you never wrote down. Even worse: it can come in the way of what is possible for you.

For this summer

Now that you've been through the toolkit — what actually landed for you?

- ② What do I want to keep doing this summer and possibly next season, out of everything in this kit?
- ② What's one thing I want to have practiced by the end of summer?

For the coming season

- ② Which sport skill needs the most attention right now?
- ② Who can actually help me with that
 - a coach,
 - a teammate,
 - someone specific?
- ② What am I doing that's already working and should stay exactly as it is?
- ② What tactic or habit do I want to do differently and how?
- ② What's the one thing I most want to improve or master this season?

Breaking it down

Take your season goal and split it. Not "get better at X" — smaller, checkable pieces:

Example — sport skill goal:

Season goal: Improve my first touch under pressure.

Monthly step: Add 10 minutes of first-touch drills to 3 sessions a week.

Weekly check: Every Sunday evening at 21:00 I check: Did I actually do the drills? (If no: why not and how can I fix this/adjust it so I will do it? HONESTY = Key! What felt different in games this week?)

Example — mental resilience goal:

Season goal: Stay steady after a mistake instead of spiraling for the rest of the game. Which cue of this mental challenge can help me? Neutral thinking

Monthly step: Practice "what is the neutral fact?" reframe after the game: every game

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mistake, AND after every practice: practice mistakes.

Weekly check: Did I catch myself spiraling this week? Did the reframe help, even a little?

Your turn

Write your season sport related goal.

Then split it:

- ② What's the monthly step that moves me toward it?
- ② What's the weekly check-in question I'll actually ask myself?
- ② When will I check in — same day each week or month, written down, not just "whenever I remember"?

Do the same for one **mental resilience** goal specifically — something from the toolkit you want to actually be able to do under pressure and practice it off season so you can implement it as soon as the season starts.

Same structure: season goal, monthly step, weekly check.

A goal without a check-in date is just a hope.

Put one in your calendar now.

"I fell in love with progress." – **Hunter Woodhall**

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BOOKS & PODCASTS

If you want to go deeper than this toolkit, these are the ones that stuck with me.

Books

The Four Tendencies — Gretchen Rubin. A personality framework that helps you understand yourself, and why other people don't operate the way you do.

The Body: A Guide for Occupants — Bill Bryson. How your body actually works, told through facts and stories you won't forget.

The Choice — Edith Eger. Drawing on her experience of the Holocaust and everyone she's helped since, on how real freedom starts with facing what you've been through, not avoiding it.

Atomic Habits — James Clear. How small, repeatable changes compound into real transformation, in your life, your career, your relationships.

The High 5 Habit — Mel Robbins. One simple daily habit, and how much control it hands back to you.

The Let Them Theory — Mel Robbins. How to stop burning energy on things you can't control — fear, self-doubt, other people.

Be Your Future Self Now — Dr. Benjamin Hardy. Getting genuinely connected to who you're becoming changes how you live and act right now.

The Diary of a CEO — Steven Bartlett. The fundamentals behind sustained excellence.

Daring Greatly — Brené Brown. How the courage to be vulnerable actually changes how you live, love, and lead.

The Happiness Trap Pocketbook — Russ Harris. How to stop struggling against your own mind and start actually living.

No Bad Parts — Richard Schwartz. This is close to where your inner team idea from earlier in this kit comes from — a model for understanding your different feelings and reactions with curiosity instead of judgment. There's a version written for younger readers too, with Bethany Hegedus.

A life hack that saved me a lot of time: you don't have to finish a book. The moment you feel you've gotten what you needed from it, it's fine to stop and move to the next one. Audio books are also a great way to 'read' these books.

Podcasts

- 🎧 The Mel Robbins Podcast
- 🎧 A Bit of Optimism
- 🎧 The Diary of a CEO (DOAC)
- 🎧 The School of Greatness
- 🎧 On Purpose with Jay Shetty

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BEFORE YOU GO

You've now had a real taste of mental resilience!

Not the theory.

The actual DIY of it.

I'm genuinely curious what landed for you.

What was your biggest insight, out of everything in here?

Let me know — I'd really like to hear it.

And if this made you want to look at your mental resilience more closely than a summer toolkit can take you — reach out.

That's exactly what I'm here for.

Your meantime valley doesn't have to end when the season starts.

Lonneke Bransz

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